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"ESCORTED BY ONE OF ENGLAND'S PROUDEST PEERS."

Mariana, the Prima Donna; or, Roses and Lilies.

BY ARABELLA SOUTHWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE TALK OF THE TOWN.

A SEA of delighted faces; a thunderous outburst of applause; tongues, hands, even feet, contributing their quota to the uproar; and above all—thrilling, divinely sweet—one last, long, perfect note.

Mariana has outdone herself. Already the idol of an adoring public, though but a new-comer, the great *prima donna* has actually eclipsed all her former triumphs; soared a degree higher on the strong pinion of Fame.

Well she has sung in Paris, in St. Petersburg, in Vienna, in Milan; but never, never has she sung or acted as she has this night.

Flushed with excitement and delight, not unnaturally inspired by sense of conquest, Mariana stands, her snowy bosom heaving, her red lips apart, the type of all that is grand and fair in woman.

Full ten minutes elapse before the opera is suffered to proceed, and then the stage is decked with flowers, and each cavatina that falls

to the share of the gifted soprano evokes an almost equal display of enthusiasm.

Mariana has every reason to be content with her greeting, that is not merely gratifying and cordial, but tumultuous. This is the first occasion on which the lovely darling of southern climes has faced the somewhat frigid stare of a London audience—so hard to please, so slow to thaw.

Mariana, though able to base her claims to favor on conspicuous merit, as well as a degree of personal fascination seldom accorded even fair lyric celebrities, may have shrunk a little from so searching an ordeal. Now she stands aglow with triumph, in her ears ringing the grateful plaudits of these finished judges before whose eyes have passed a long succession of dramatic aspirants, yet who instinctively, as with one voice, award her the palm.

Envious looks, indeed, pass among the other members of the troupe, that has been brought together by dint of great care and painstaking selection, the impresario being minded to make the hit of the season, believing the new *prima donna* to be worth untold gold. The worst is, she is willful. She will not be coerced.

Imagine the tenth child of a Tyrolean goat-herd swaying the hearts of an assemblage like this, representing the birth, the wealth, the talent of Imperial England! And with such an air, too—such proud consciousness of superiority! Were she their sovereign, she could not queen it one whit more royally.

One born to command, to dazzle, to enchant, is of a truth the lovely and gifted Mariana.

Well, the fourth act is over. The hubbub of departure has set in. Outside, under that well-known colonnade, all is clatter and confusion; hooded forms throng the stairs; beauty jostles poverty; and wealth may be seen jowl by jowl with squalor; and in the luxurious seclusion of her dressing-room, miraculously elegant, and sweet with the fragrance of myriad flowers, all breathing Love, and lending grace to undying memories, sits the great singer, idly toying with a dazzling bracelet, while her maid Annette—a trim little personage, attired with the demure coquetry, the common attribute of your Parisian Abigail—removes the diamond stars that to-night have sparkled in the soft, silky masses of that beautiful dark hair.

"Madame has had a great success," smilingly observes clever Mademoiselle Annette, replacing the splendid gems in their appropriate case.

Mariana smiles.

"Yes," she says. "But" (turning herself about quickly) "what do I care? He was not there; he did not hear."

"Who?—Monsieur le Duc?" demands Annette.

"Monsieur le Duc!" echoes her mistress. "As if I cared two straws about Monsieur le Duc, or any monsieur, in fact, except—"

"Oh, madame!" softly interpolates Annette; "when he loves you so! I am sure the poor gentleman is quite miserable."

"You know very well who I mean."

"Then I wish I didn't," rejoins Annette, briskly. "Ah, madame, you are wasting your heart! You transfigure the object of your affection."

Mariana is silent; sits awhile lost in thought.

"Come, girl," says she, at length, heaving a weary sigh—she, whom you would imagine transported with ecstasy, in a very delirium of delight—"my cloak; I cannot stay here forever; and see that the room is tidy before you go. To-day I found a pearl solitaire upon the floor. I am rich, but not rich enough to waste pearls."

Annette makes no answer to this somewhat petulant observation. She deems it best not. Her mistress, though the most generous of women, and tender as an angel—do you need to be consoled?—still has a temper, and is apt to resent, and that quickly, anything like contradiction.

Therefore, Annette places the costly, furred cloak, that must be worth a little fortune, on those classic shoulders in humble silence.

But when she is alone, an ironic smile curves her lips.

"I daresay not," says she, "with that great brute for ever tugging at your purse-strings! Ah, madame, what fools we women are—the best and wisest of us! There is Gustave. I love him like my life; but I know he is a rascal. What does that signify, though, when one loves?"

And Annette clasps her hands, and loses sight of her employer's weakness, engrossed in the sweet contemplation of her own.

Escorted by one of England's proudest peers, before whom royalty itself has before now had occasion to feel rather small, the new *prima donna*, followed by not a few acrimonious looks—she is held to be absurdly grand by her colleagues of the green-room—seeks her carriage, as well-appointed as that of any lady in the land.

"May I come no further?" softly breathes his Grace, as, with a lingering pressure of those dainty finger-tips, he reluctantly relinquishes his pleasant task.

"Not to-night," she answers.

"I obey," says he; "but only to pray you may relent."

She laughs.

"Thanks for the roses," she adds, at parting. "They are charming. They make me quite fond of my new home."

"Would they might do the same by—"

What further stupidity might fall from those august lips boots not telling, for at that moment the spirited horses plunge forward, the wheels revolve, Mariana is gone.

CHAPTER II.

SHE LOVED NOT WISELY.

On re-entering her luxurious drawing-room, softly lit by the mellow flame of countless slim waxen tapers, set in many-branched sconces deftly hung here and there upon the walls, rich in pictures, in many instances of conspicuous merit, Mariana takes a hurried look round, as if she expected to find some one.

She has barely been a fortnight in London, yet this cosey little house of hers is, I do assure you, as bright and attractive as though it had been the object of the tenderest solicitude for months.

Something there is about this woman that naturally inspires pleasure. Grace clings to her very raiment. She sets the fashion wherever she goes.

Now throwing off the lace shawl in which she is partially enveloped, she hastens to the conservatory. Empty! With an impatient ejaculation, Mariana returns to the drawing-room, flings herself down upon a couch, as if thoroughly disgusted by the failure of her anticipations, that would seem to have been pleasant. A dreamy smile curved her lips as she traversed the hall.

Anon she sighs—the sort of quick, impatient sigh apt to rise to the lips of a woman who, loving passionately, with self-sacrificing ardor, is tormented by a suspicion that he whom she adores scarcely merits his good fortune, that he neither appreciates nor even rightly comprehends the worth of such fidelity.

A shade of bitterness, passing strange, minglest with Mariana's gloom. She, this brilliant queen, who has but to spend a meaning glance to have at her feet the flower of European chivalry, she pining her heart out for any man, particularly one whose crass density of intellect prevents him from recognizing the immensity of this boon so lavishly yielded him by Fate, who weaves so strangely, now and then, almost as though the expert worker had forgot her cunning, the web ran all awry.

Nay, it is strange, truly! It may well test belief.

But women like Mariana, the poor "bindweed," as they called her, when, some twenty and odd years ago, she first lifted up her wailing voice against the inequalities, the bitter, grinding oppressiveness of the laws so widely in force all over the earth, darkening the lot of the poor man, and adding little either to the

wealth or happiness of the rich; the "bindweed," whose very presence reveals poverty—who can only flourish where barrenness prevails; the "bindweed," who is destined to sway nations, and mold the taste and educate the sympathies of those boasting the highest culture—I repeat, it is not an uncommon thing for women like Mariana, of profound depth of character, and strength of individual bias, to cherish this species of dog-like attachment.

The master they choose is invariably their inferior. But being possessed of a vivid imagination, they clothe him in the attributes of the noblest.

He himself is, as a rule, utterly unconscious of this adventitious greatness.

He wonders a little, maybe, how it comes to pass that he has succeeded in making so favorable an impression; how it is that "she" is so fond of him; what she sees in him, in short, because, after all, there is not much difference between him and other fellows; but there self-analysis ends.

Suddenly some one raps.

Up springs the great opera singer; every vestige of languor banished. Joy, pure and simple, intense, eloquent delight her sole emotion.

"He is here!" rapturously exclaims she, her noble form drawn proudly up to its full height, her hands clasped; and would rush to bid him welcome, did not a servant at that instant, bowing low with Continental deference announce, "Count Rocco."

"Ah, Paulo!" exclaims Mariana, enfolding him in her embrace, to which he responds affectionately enough, passing his hand fondly over her hair, and pressing a kiss upon her lips. "Paulo—and is it thou, thou at last? But why so late? It is past midnight. I had quite given thee up."

"What made you do that, *carissima?*" says he, seating himself on the couch.

Not unattractive-looking is Rocco; a short, well-made man of about thirty, to judge by his face—that is a trifle too brown, perhaps, to suit English taste, yet possesses claims to be deemed handsome, if only because of the regularity of its features, and open expression, that is essentially manly. "You and I are inseparable."

"Would I could believe it, Paulo!" somewhat mournfully returns she. "Sometimes I think—"

"You should never think!" quickly interposes he. "Thinking spoils women."

Just a shade of scorn reflects the smile occasioned by this sally.

"And what of the opera?" resumes Paulo, adopting a more comfortable attitude, leaning back so that his soft, velvety, dark eyes gaze steadily into hers. No passion as yet lurks in their shadowy depths, only keen calculation, the light of reason unobscured.

Yet her beauty pleases him. A soft sense of satisfaction stirs his blood.

"You are very beautiful, love," murmurs he, beneath that thick mustache of his, the possession of which affords him so much and genuine content. "You have had a triumph; your eyes glitter."

She smiles, letting her hand rest on his arm.

"Nay," says she; "it is but because they dwell on you. I was dull enough five minutes ago; but when I heard you knock, all my melancholy vanished. I knew myself as I am—the very happiest of women."

It is not in man's nature to resist flattery of this order. It creeps into his ears like magic.

For some while love holds sway over these two. Little is said, and that in whispers.

By-and-by, however, Rocco regains consciousness. He is the first to wake; a fact in itself not devoid of significance. By such signs alone may love be gauged.

"You have not told me," says he, breaking the silence that is to Mariana more tuneful than all speech, "how you got on to-night. Was it a great success, or merely tentative? The English are a chilly set."

"They were very kind to me," she answers.

"They could not have been kinder. But, ah, Paulo! I longed but for one face."

He feigns ignorance of the drift of this.

"What, the Duke's, I suppose you mean?" says he, with somewhat affected coldness, rearranging his coat. He is attired in evening dress, that becomes him well.

"The Duke's!" echoes she, tender reproach shining in her eyes. "As if I cared for any duke! No; Paulo, thine, thine, my beloved! Why do you hazard so stupid a guess?" she adds, after a moment.

"He was there, though," ironically.

"Yes, of course. You know he always makes a point of attending first appearances."

The smile lurking beneath Paulo's mustache deepens.

"I know he is a very magnanimous and enlightened gentleman," rejoins he, still in the same ironic vein. "I know also that he knows the worth of your smiles."

The look on a certain expressive face would seem to say, "And that is more than some people do;" but Mariana makes no remark—suffers Paulo to proceed with his theme.

It is well-worn—almost threadbare, indeed; the marked infatuation of the great personage in question being too much a thing of note to escape comment.

"I suppose he escorted you to your carriage," pursues Paulo, sarcastically, "and found occasion to make himself extremely agreeable? It is only natural if he did."

"In that case," says the *prima donna*, coolly, "why speak of it? Have you supped? You will find the table laid."

"Does that mean I am to go?" questions Paulo, turning on her the full force of his lustrous eyes.

She is silent; hers fall.

"Ah," says he, "this time last year I should scarcely have had need to utter those words!" And his voice grows reproachful, he heaves a sigh.

"Why—why will you pester me with these foolish accusations?" exclaims she, unclasping one of the superb bracelets that decorate either bare, shapely arm—arms that in their day have performed many an arduous task, carried many a fagot up the steep hillside, drawn many a pailful of clear, sparkling water from the old, rudely-fashioned well.

Mariana's childhood was no empty playtime. It embodies some of the most rigorous memories garnered throughout her life. It and old age inspire her with about equal aversion.

"Of what do I accuse you?" rejoins he, in a tone rather of languid indifference than quick self-defense.

Is it possible that words like these have already passed between them, marring the even tenor of their love, infusing bitterness where all should be honey-sweet?

"You are perpetually harboring some foolish jealousy," retorts she; and her manner, compared with his, affords a sufficiently striking contrast.

Paulo smiles, that peculiarly unpleasant smile of his, that is so devoid of mirth.

"I harbor jealousy!" quoth he,—"I who would have beauty liberal as the sun? I am incapable of jealousy, my love, believe me!" with a low laugh, as though the words conveyed a second meaning.

The stung blood courses swiftly over Mariana's face. For a second she averts her head.

"Then why do you twit me about the Duke?" responds she. "Why, when we last met, was Gardolfi the subject of your unceasing insinuations? Have you forgotten that night at Naples?"

"No!" exclaims Rocco, straightening himself up, and clutching her tightly by the wrist; his fingers seem to crush the tender flesh; she has to bite her lip to suppress a cry. "No; neither do I intend you to forget it! You are mine, and mine you shall be! When I find you belong to some other, I will kill him, even as I would have killed that simpering fool. Ah," with an upward movement of the bright eyes, a caustic laugh, "I can see him now. Little he thought

who was near! Another instant, and he would have lain where he stood, lifeless.

"Ah, horrible!" exclaims she; too southern, perhaps, to thoroughly appreciate the villainy of assassination. "You hurt me! Let go my hand!"

"It is well, though," says he, relaxing his hold somewhat, "that you should be able to realize the fate in store for my successor," grimly.

"Yet you say you are not jealous," with a fond smile.

"I am not; but I put no faith in women."

"Paulo, am I, then, so little to you that you class me with the rest?"

"You are all the world to me; but I cannot trust you any more than"—ironically—"I trust the world."

"Not when I swear I never loved but you—never knew what love meant until we met? Why I used to laugh at love, Paulo. The very word roused in me nothing but contempt. I thought it a foolish thing until—until—"

"Until," says he, fondly, with real tenderness, bending on her adoring eyes, taking her gently in his arms, "you stepped down from the pedestal of your greatness, to lay your head here, where may it ever rest, most dear! Let us heal our brief disagreement with just one kiss."

Truly, a model lover, Paulo Rocco, when the savage in him sleeps, and he surrenders himself to the influence of benignant passion.

"Paulo," whispers she, "vow you love only me. Tell it me again. Say it softly—so!" nestling close to him, her face buried in his neck.

"I vow it, sweet!" says he.

She sighs—a long, deep sigh of utter happiness.

"Ah, that is good. That warms my heart."

"And now, queen of flowers," in a lighter tone, "you shall give your poor Paulo a cup of wine, for I am fatigued, darling. My journey has tired me," with a broad yawn, fairly indicative of somewhat marked weariness.

CHAPTER III.

WILL IT BE A MATCH?

"WHAT a heavenly day!" exclaims Paulina Perrers, clasping her white, tiny hands, soft as any baby's, over her golden head, and gazing up longingly at the great white clouds that slowly, slowly sail away to the west over the sunlit expanse of azure blue that domes Dummersmede—beautiful Dummersmede, like fairy-land for beauty.

"Just the very thing one was longing for, after all this dullness! Say, is it not fine, Athelstane?" turning to a young man, who, his legs indolently crossed, lounges at his ease in a large cane rocking-chair, set by the open window, through which you may discern terraced grounds, all green turf and brilliant flower-beds; a gorgeous peacock spreads his tail in the sight of admiring humanity. "Say, too!" with a little pout, the pretty hands still clasped,—the young man seems immersed in the book he is reading; pays not the slightest heed, which is very rude of him, to say the least;—"Say, too," imperiously adds Miss Paulina, "whether you are not at this very moment maniacally pining to take me for a ride! Answer instantly"—with a stamp of the little foot—"on pain of the severest penalties ingenuity can conceive, or ruthless cruelty inflict."

"Eh?" says he, for the first time, uplifting placid, violet eyes—eyes such as you do not see in one man's head in ten thousand. "What now, little one?"

"Athelstane," exclaimed Miss Perrers, putting on a look of most magnificent superiority, "you are really too bad! Here have I been raving at you—actually raving—for the last half-hour, and you have the impertinence to ask 'What is it?' not too successfully mimicking the languid tones of that pleasant voice. "Besides," pursues this haughty dame, "I don't like being called little. I'm not little"—grandly putting her hands to her waist, turning herself about with an air of charming self-

satisfaction, making a few dance-steps—an air that is charming in her, but would be very much the reverse with a more majestic woman—"not littler than most people."

Athelstane laughs, leaning back his golden head. They are both fair. Their hair is of almost exactly the same shade.

Yet is Mr. Bede by no means effeminate-looking. The easy hang of his long limbs, the limber grace of his well-knit frame, at once, even at a glance, denote strength.

"Paulina," says he, surveying the girl as she coquets with her own shadow, "you are a provoking little fairy! I beg pardon"—she looks round at him over her shoulder with arch disapproval,—"for having again tripped over that offensive epithet,—but you are. What do you want me to do now? I know something underlies all that wheedling."

"Wheedling!" echoes she, scornfully. "As if I would condescend to wheedle? No, sir; I command. And I command you to order the horses, and forthwith take me for a ride."

"After luncheon, dear; there is not time now," inspecting a solid gold hunter.

"What time is it?—or, rather, what time do you pretend it is? I know you, Mr. Athelstane! You are as deceitful as—as—Come, now," checking herself, pausing to consider, "what shall I say?—what is the falsest thing in all the world? Oh! I have it!" gleefully, breaking into a merry laugh, that goes rippling and sparkling out into the summer air,—"Lilly Lunelle's eyebrows. There, now; I hope you are content to be coupled with your pet aversion. I know you hate her because she loves you so. Is not that nice? How does it feel, Athelstane?—how does it feel?" coming and playfully perching herself—she weighs little more than a child—on the arm of his chair, evincing a sneaking disposition to slyly pinch his ear. But he prisons both her hands, divining as much. "I wish you were my brother," she goes on, mock-ruefully; "then I could kiss you, just put my arms around your neck, and give you a great hug! On these kind of days I always feel as if I wanted to hug some one. I go a little mad, I think."

"I think you do," tranquilly, a half-smile of somewhat ironic amusement flickering gravely about the well-cut mouth. "However, if it will be any pleasure to you, pray hug me as much as you please. You know you are quite at liberty."

"Precisely the very reason why I would rather die than commit such a folly!" hotly, the big blue eyes lit by something very like an angry flash. "No, Mr. Bede; you are not at all the sort of man I should care to—to—"

"Hug!" quietly interposes he. "Well, no; perhaps, after all, the process might present some disagreeable features."

Paulina burst out laughing.

"You solemn old thing!" exclaims she; "you take everything seriously! Let go my hand, please; I want to make my hair tidy. It is coming down; and what will grandma say if she finds us sitting here in this most affectionate attitude, and me with all my ambrosial locks streaming? I should like to see your face under the circumstances."

"Then you shall," mischievously whispers he,—and, by a deft twist of those strong white fingers, withdraws the single hair-pin that confines that burnished mass—lets it fall mantlewise almost to the ground.

Up starts Paulina.

"Oh, you bad—" commences she, very real annoyance now pervading her soft, flushed face, when the door opens. A stately elderly lady enters, on whose silver locks rests the crown alike of wisdom and years; a lady whose portly form conveys a sense, somehow, of mingled gentleness and majesty, amply well borne out by the sweet, pensive expression of her still beautiful face.

She surveys the surprising scene.

"Well, my children," says she, at length, "amusing yourselves as usual, I suppose, with some fresh frolic. Paulina, love, should you not seek your room, and let Benson re-arrange

your hair? Is it not beautiful, Athelstane? What a pity girls no longer wear curls, and that so rich an adornment, must be twisted away into an ignominious little knot. However,"—with a slight wave of the fan Mrs. Bede is never without, winter or summer, and in the skillful management of which she simply excels, together with the placing of her once peerless arms, that now gracefully folded lend an appearance of great elegance to her general air,—“however, fashion commands, and we obey, believing beauty always beautiful.”

With a deprecatory and blushing “Oh, grandma!” emphasized by a delicious flutter of pink palms, Paulina hastily departs, leaving Mrs. Bede and her darling step-son to gaze mutually up and down upon each other, apparently quite to their satisfaction.

“Well, Athel,” says the old lady, at length, “and how prospers this cherished scheme of mine? Do you make any progress in the conquest of this most erratic young lady’s affections? How pretty she is! You will have a charming wife.”

Athelstane Bede’s brow slightly contracts. He shifts his position in a way that seems to indicate just a shade of impatience.

“Why speak of that, mother?” says he. “She is such a child—a veritable baby. It would be almost sacrilege, it seems to me, to infringe on the threshold of her innocence with any thoughts of her marrying or giving in marriage. Such things are for girls far more mature than she.”

Mrs. Bede’s fine face grows scornful.

“What nonsense!” she exclaims. “What a surface view to take! Paulina Perrers is by no means the bread-and-butter miss you imagine. She very well apprehends the extent of her own charms, artless as she seems. Wait!” and Mrs. Bede’s voice takes a note of warning, even menace—“wait until Paulina happens to meet the man who realizes her ideal, and you will see. Paulina can love, and that warmly and truly, if I am not mistaken.”

And Mrs. Bede compresses her lips, gazes out into space. Her heart, then, is set on it—the union of these two.

Athelstane hazards a slight shrug—a somewhat ironic smile curves his lips.

“That may be,” says he; “but you overlook the fact that there is no reason why I should be that man.”

“There is no reason why you should not,” is the dry retort.

Athelstane is silent. He has nothing to say to that. Possibly he cherishes his own conviction all the same.

“Athel,” says Mrs. Bede, presently, again regarding him, now with eyes mellowed by tenderness, “you are throwing away a great chance. Paulina will marry some one; why should she not marry you? You know very well that her fortune is just the very thing needed to disembarass your property; at least,”—correcting herself,—“the property that will some day be yours, when I am no more”—heaving a slight sigh.

The world seems hard to quit under its present sunny aspect.

“Do not speak of that day, dear mother,” says Athelstane, affectionately. Clearly they are much attached, despite this passing wrangle.

“But, anyhow, I wish to put the facts clearly before you.”

“You have done so, so often,” comments he.

“Yes; and I do so again, in the hope that you will be wise and not turn a deaf ear to the counsels, the pressing counsels of reason. It is indeed a very sad thing to think of all Paulina’s large possessions passing into the hands of strangers when they might be kept in the family.”

“I cannot see it,” says he. Very probably they would do the strangers far more good. Besides, mother, I cannot marry simply for money. Thanks to your goodness I never know a want. I have ample means to look forward to; why, then, should I sell myself?”

“It is not a question of barter,” she answers; “it is a mere question of common sense.

Were you a needy man, I should be the first to deprecate anything like fortune-hunting; but the scales are balanced. Have you no ambition, Athelstane? Sometimes I think this country life is not good for you; that you should have a change, and see more of the world. Here, perhaps, you rust. Ah, Paulina!” that young lady suddenly presenting herself at the open window, arrayed in her habit, which garment suits her admirably, a pleased smile on her charming lips, her hands full of lovely fresh-gathered roses.

Mrs. Bede casts a triumphant glance at Athelstane, as much to say, “See what a lovely bride I would win for you!”

“Always sweet and happy, love,” says she, fondly laying her hand on the girl’s arm.

“See, grandmamma,” says Paulina, “I have brought you three little roses. Ar’n’t they darlings? And there, Mr. Impertinent, there’s something for you! And oh, grandma, I feel inclined to jump for joy; the sun has fairly got into my head!”

“Do not let him turn it, then,” says Mrs. Bede. “It would be no wonder though, would it?” she adds, lightly patting a soft, warm cheek.

CHAPTER IV.

AN IMPORTANT INTRODUCTION.

Now the route selected by our equestrians this fine afternoon happens to be quite one of the prettiest discoverable even in a neighborhood proverbially rich in natural beauty. It leads through old world lanes, whose high hedges, trellised o’er by bryony, and eglantine, and fair with many a floweret of whose name the unlearned will do well to confess his ignorance, yet whose modest charm thence sustains no loss; beneath high waving boughs, through which the wind strays pleasantly, rustling the tall ears of corn—for this is the heyday of the earth, and presently the sickles will be gleaming, and the reapers at work among the fields.

Little is said by either Athelstane or Paulina, who, to tell the truth, is quite absorbed with her own thoughts. Sometimes the prospect opened up to her by sundry hints and semi-obscure sayings of grandma’s seems to present certain attractions, a trifle vague, yet able to be apprehended, if not of men, then of angels such as Miss Paulina Perrers—a name the weight and worth of which should by rights strike the reader dumb with envy.

We may as well at once and finally observe that Miss Perrers is the orphan heiress of the enormous property situated in one of the most charming parts of England, not very remote from these very bosky glades and sunny slopes, whose beauties now detain our lingering gaze, commonly known as Perrers’ Towers—though “Perrers,” short and sweet, is its more familiar and select appellation.

Paulina’s mother was a Bede, and married Mr. Perrers, a distant cousin, rather against her father’s consent. He had other views for her. He thought Athelstane Bede’s daughter should wed a coronet at least.

It was ever his dream to see his then only beloved child thus established. However, Miss Bede chose for herself. Hence Paulina inherits Perrers, together with divers other choice possessions—notably, a large sum in the funds, sundry works of art, and a collection of engraved gems past price.

But the young lady thinks little of all this. She has borne the brunt of a London season—undergone that fiery ordeal. She has been admired a good deal; people have pointed her out in the Park and in the Row, where her really good riding soon established her claims to supremacy; people have been found ready to admit that really Miss Perrers was a “striking little thing;” but the glamor of fashionable gayety never for one instant laid claim to the girl’s heart.

She went through it smilingly, and with admirable nerve.

Where many a belle of repute would have worried herself sick for the delay of a toilette,

or the negligence of a partner, Paulina troubled herself not at all.

It was very well, but it was not meant to last; and sometimes, I think, the child’s mind went straying back to the sunny days at Perrers, when the luncheon-table was full, and the old place resounded with fun and laughter, and Athel essayed his prowess at lawn tennis. But that was so long ago, away in the dim, dim past. And now they ride side by side, and—

“Oh, Athel!” exclaims she, suddenly recalled by the presence of fact from the crowd of dreams; “what a lot of people! Who are they?”

Athel looks up. He, too, has been plunged in thought, jogging along tamely, the reins lying loose on Jeannette’s neck—Jeannette, the sunny sorrel—his last Christmas-box. Mrs. Bede spares no pains, shrinks from no expense—why should she?—is she not rich?—to secure the love, the trust of this son of hers, son in every sense of the word. To tell the truth, Athel’s future seems to have widened—to have suddenly assumed a different look.

“The Cavershams,” says he, none too sweetly; “and, of course, any number of hangers-on.”

Paulina, in common with the ruck of people who compose what is euphemistically termed Society, has frequently met Lady Caversham, short, thin, and, in the language of the vulgar, milk-and-waterish, in the houses whither the fashionable most do congregate. Lady Caversham has attained a certain notoriety, we will not say fame, owing to her devoted efforts to secure an admirer who shall be lasting. Hundreds of swains have fluttered at her fane, but none have ever gone further than just the veriest singe of the wings. This insures no applause.

From Miss Perrers’s point of view, Agnes, Countess of Caversham, is just one of those silly, frivolous leaders of society to be met with everywhere, consequently of no more particular consequence than any other such versatile female, whose talents may be said to comprise an area of apparently interminable compass.

“My dear Miss Perrers,” exclaims her ladyship, bending on that young lady a pair of glittering, steel-blue eyes—people do say Lady Caversham rather “makes up;” but people will say things about every one—extending a tiny hand, “whence do you hail? How charmed I am to see you!”

Vivian, Lady Caversham’s mare, fidgets a little, affording her ladyship full scope for showing off the lissomness of her figure, habited in the neatest of Amazones, it need scarcely be said. Lady Caversham is noted for her quick sense of the becoming.

“I am staying with my grandmother,” says Paulina, simply, deftly reining in her own steed.

“Oh, at Dummersmude—yes—I recollect;” and a glance of the lynx eyes at Athelstane, who is conversing with a seemingly tall, chestnut-bearded man, who, his hunting crop laid across his horse’s mane, glances in his turn furtively at Miss Perrers. “Do you know Captain Leycester Miles—pretty name, isn’t it?—let me introduce you? Captain Miles, Miss Perrers.”

Miles and Paulina bow, each taking leisurely stock of the other’s somewhat pronounced attractions.

“Which way are you going?—ours, of course? Oh, you can’t say no. Come,”—dealing Athelstane a light blow of the whip. “I book you for a canter on Elstrop Down.”

CHAPTER V.

IS HE A MARRYING MAN?

THE impression made by Leycester Miles on Paulina is, it must be confessed, distinctly agreeable, despite that nimble-tongued young lady’s somewhat lively appreciation of her fellow-creatures’ more salient defects. She admits as much to herself, in the saintly privacy of her own dressing-room, as cunningly devised a little nook as ever graced maiden medi-

tation. Before her looking-glass, her shining tresses surrendered to the skillful manipulation of Benson, Miss Perrers tells herself—in strict confidence, of course, under an inviolable vow of secrecy—that there is something particularly nice in being talked to and benignantly smiled upon by this big man with the broad, candid brow, and curly, long brown beard. Nay, more, takes a strand of her own bright hair, and mentally compares it with the hue and texture of that hirsute appendage.

Matters having assumed this complexion, it is with just a faint stir of satisfaction that Paulina hears Mr. Bede observe, as he declines the Chateaubriand in favor of sweet-breads *a la jardinier* (the cookery at Dummersmede is invariably superb). Mrs. Bede, in fact, quite prides herself on the excellence of all her domestic arrangements, being a bit of a sybarite)—“By the by, mother, who do you think is staying at Whiteladies?”

“Don’t know, I am sure, dear,” is the placid response. “Who?”

“You know that fellow I used to be at old Pycroft’s with—that’s rather an awkward way of putting it, and they’ve overdone the gravy—it’s too thick. That comes of allowing flour in a kitchen—Leycester Miles! He came here for Easter, and you rather liked him.”

“Oh, I recollect,” says Mrs. Bede. Paulina, be it observed, rather despises Athelstane for his predilection for what used to be termed, once upon a time, the “pleasures of the table.” She thinks it piggish of him to care so very dreadfully much about what he eats or does not eat, losing sight, in the natural ebullience of youth, of the insignificant fact that, so far from porcine taste erring on the score of nicety, exactly the contrary prevails. However, “Oh, I recollect,” says Mrs. Bede, “quite well. A very nice, frank young fellow. Well, and what is he doing at Whiteladies? Is he going to marry Miss Lunelle?”

Athelstane smiles. Miss Lunelle is Lady Caversham’s step-sister, and has been popularly supposed the object of sundry eligible bachelors’ attention. Indeed, every man who visits there, and can, if he pleases, take unto himself a wife, is promptly assigned to the captivating Lilla. But, as a matter of fact, the pact between the sisters amounts merely to this: “I’ll throw dust in the world’s eyes, if you will aid and abet me.”

Lilla Lunelle knows very well that not one man in seventy, nay, in a hundred, would dream of offering his hand, let alone his heart, to a girl deep in all the mysteries, the secrets of Whiteladies. Still, the sisters contrive to agree. They seem always, outwardly, on the best of terms.

With smiling heroism, Lilla accepts the role she has to play, while my lady is the same to her she is to every one—namely, sweetly false, and occasionally so exacting and tyrannic as to be little short of cruel. Particularly does any symptom of insubordination exhibit itself; any inclination to break bounds, and assume a more independent part.

People gibe at and despise Miss Lunelle. They say all sorts of cutting and unkind things about her; but although individually she ranks low in the scale of creation, there is much in her lot to awaken compassion. She might have turned out better under other circumstances. As it is, she is fast developing into a type of woman as repulsive as it is frequent: reckless, self-abandoned, ready to plunge into any frivolity, to risk any peril, however flagrant, sooner than remain the prey of a tormenting conscience, the agonized victim of never-ceasing remorse.

Lady Caversham owes a good deal of her social status to Lilla. Lilla it is who sedulously whitens the platter. Lilla it is who detects the merest fly-spots on character, mere specks of corruption that do but need the full sunlight of publicity to ripen into life.

Lilla, however, gets little thanks for her pains—nay, occasionally she is called “meddling” and a “hypocrite.” Bitter indeed have been the moments when athwart this

girl of the period’s phantasmagoric brain has flitted a vision of what might have been had she, in the days of her youth, now fast on the wane, foreseen the consequences of many a rash act, rightly estimated the cost of such and such a deed of capricious folly.

But no; Lilla Lunelle has taken up her cross, and she must bear it in silent misery to the end. Perhaps this, too, may be accounted with her for righteousness when from things earthly parts the veil. Such is the girl Leycester Miles is supposed to seek in marriage.

Paulina’s cheeks flame. She discerns the injustice. Athelstane smiles. “Hardly,” says he. “Miles may not be a remarkably brilliant specimen, but he is scarcely such a fool as that.”

“I do not think he is a fool at all,” observes Paulina, chilly, her eyes bent on the peach, whence she is in the act of removing the stone.

“Oh,” says Mrs. Bede; “well, that’s something.”

“Of course, one cannot tell,” pursues the girl; “he talks very sensibly. He has been traveling in Russia.”

“Is he an idle, fine gentleman, then?” demands the old lady, dryly. Prone to scent danger, she discerns in this sudden preference something slightly objectionable.

“I should imagine,” says Athel, carelessly, balancing a silver knife on two long white fingers, “that he has a sufficiency—not rich, you know, but enough to live upon. His father is moderately well off.”

“Who is his father?” demands Miss Perrers, evincing awakened interest.

“Why, Lord Mortlake, of course,”—with a kind of “Where were you born?” air, a touch irritating.

“I do not see, of course, at all,” retorts Paulina, hotly; and there seems a fair chance of a downright assault of words, these readiest, most easily handled of weapons; for, she adds, a moment or two afterward, “I do not spend my time in devouring the ‘Peerage,’”—a somewhat palpable hit at Athelstane, who, if he has a weakness, errs on the side of a rooted belief in the virtue of birth, when Mrs. Bede timely interferes, observing, in a would-be easy tone,—although her elderly heart beats, and she feels desperately afraid of the consequences of a fray, that might undo all her most cherished hopes, and undermine the work of years,—“Children, children, we seem to be in danger of courting indigestion. There is something in the very mention of this Captain Miles apparently as choleric as his beard.”

“Had he a beard when you knew him, then, grandma?” demands Paulina, with clasped hands, and quite feverish earnestness.

“Dear me, yes, child—as red as that peach, and as long as your arm.”

“It’s not red, grandma,” exclaims the girl. “It’s a lovely bright auburn—just the tint that artists idolize.”

“Bright what you like,” rejoins Mrs. Bede, rising. “I say it is red, and I have a fairly good eye for color. Athelstane,” pausing a moment to rest her hand, not all insignificantly, upon his shoulder, “don’t be long. I want you to read me that new poem; and Paulina will like to hear it—won’t you, dear?” appealing to the maiden, who stands at the door, gloomily swinging her fan.

“I don’t know, grandma,” says she. “I thought of going out,” a cloudy look obscuring the sweet face—a look it very seldom wears, very seldom indeed.

Mrs. Bede closes her lips—a trick of hers when vexed.

“I shall expect you,” says she, with just the least perceptible pressure.

When Athelstane re-enters the drawing-room, perhaps an hour later, he finds Mrs. Bede seated by the open window, coffee cup in hand, apparently inhaling the soft evening breeze. Clove pinks and stocks pour forth a mingled fragrance, the evening star beams remote above the trees, the gray night moths hover fitfully about the drowsy flowers. All

nature seems to court repose, wooing the summer night to sleep. Athelstane scans the deserted room—deserted save for her, who, recognizing his step, fondly turns to smile him welcome. Never a moment of her life but Mrs. Bede is glad of Athel.

“Well, mother,” says he, negligently throwing himself into a seat. “And where’s Paulina—gone out star-gazing? I’m afraid I rather put the young lady’s mettle up just now! Quite unintentionally, I am sure.”

“Are you sure?” searchingly.

“Why, certainly. Why should I wish to wound her?”

“No; but may not your feelings be to blame?—may not pique have had something to do with it?”

At that Athel fairly laughs.

“Pique!” he echoes; “pique, about what?”

“What occurred this afternoon?”

“What did occur? Really, I cannot recollect anything fit to be elevated to the dignity of an occurrence.”

“Athel,” says Mrs. Bede, setting down her cup, “if you juggle with my words, I shall have no more to say. Cannot you see what a fatal impression this Captain Leycester Miles has made on Paulina? Why, her whole mind is full of him already! What it will be before he leaves Whiteladies I cannot imagine—a runaway match, in all probability.”

“Mother,” says Athel, in a slightly graver tone than he is wont to employ, “don’t run your dear head against so absurd a notion. Leycester’s game, in this part of the country, is very wide apart from that, at all events. He has no thought of marrying; and, indeed, if he had, I doubt whether a certain person would permit it. Leycester is somewhat deeply dipped.”

Over Mrs. Bede’s face spreads a look of horror.

“Is that it?” then says she, strikingly.

“That’s it,” rejoins Athel, crossing his legs.

“So if Paulina does happen to take a fancy to the fellow, she’ll have to get over it somehow, for I’ll be shot if he’s got a soul to marry with. That’s gone to the deuce long ago!”—with the grim satisfaction one man feels in stating the utter collapse, social or moral, of another, knowing that his own turn may come any day.

It is well to be beforehand.

“Unhappy young man!” mourns Mrs. Bede. “To what a pass are things coming! Why, he can’t possibly be more than five-and-twenty?”

“Say thirty, and you’ll be nearer the mark.”

“What, sitting in the dark!” here exclaims a clear, girlish voice; and Paulina looms spectrally white through the dusk. “I declare you look as cheerful as two owls in a church tower! I shall expect you to hoot soon. Tu-whit, tu-whit, tu-who-o-o-o! Ring for lights, Athel, do!”

CHAPTER VI.

UNWELCOME GUESTS.

FOR days Paulina Perrers is conscious of a devouring restlessness, an ever-increasing desire, the precise gist of which is a hopeless mystery. It is not a new gown—two such true feminine luxuries still remain intact in their silver paper wrappings. It is not a new hat—Paulina eschews bonnets like poison—her hat is so becoming, that she is in the habit of vowing she will never buy another. Besides, did any of these wants exist, it could scarcely be called a consuming craving, for Miss Perrers has but to signify her wish to Mrs. Errington and Mdme. Elsie, instantly to lay the talents of those eminent artistes at her feet. Miss Perrers is an heiress, and enjoys the privileges of wealth. Paulina has no idea of penury, so physical wants alone, nay, nor even mental—for Dummersmede is well stocked with all kinds of intellectual toys—can be held accountable for this strange restlessness—this peculiar inability to sit still—to do aught, in short, save wander, and aimlessly wander

hither and thither, through thicket and glade, over field and fallow, book in hand—a sorry pretense, for, rest assured, Paulina makes no attempt to read; but one must have something, if only to beguile the gaze of the ubiquitous rustic, who must ever have an eye on his neighbors—even neighbors as remote as the guests of the Squire.

"My dear love," says Mrs. Bede, one day, coming on Paulina ensconced in a corner of a couch, her face buried in the cushions, her slight frame heaving and shaking, apparently the prey to violent grief—what can have distressed you so? Is it possible that any of us have been unkind?"

Paulina sobs on. Then agitatedly wiping her eyes, and uplifting her tear-stained visage, says, huskily, "Oh, grandma! I beg your pardon, but I am so unhappy!" And the ready tears flow afresh, and down droops the golden head.

"But why, my love?" demands grandmamma. "Has Althestane said anything that—" It seems to Mrs. Bede that the girl's emotion gathers, that she sobs all the more distractedly, that her tears flow the faster at those words.

"Hush!—hush, love!" says she, gently, patting the sufferer on the back, as you might a bawling child. "I can very soon put all that to rights; don't you trouble your dear head about that!"

"But, grandmamma—" gurgles Paulina, half choked 'twixt fear and grief.

Mrs. Bede rises.

"Never mind, love," pursues she; "I will send Benson to you. Lie down; try to take a nap. Perhaps a few drops of sal volatile—At all events, I hope to find you much better by dinner-time. And, Paulina"—strenuously—"please don't distress yourself. All will come right. I pledge my word it shall."

"Heaven grant it may!" mentally reverberates Paulina, and then starting up.

Mrs. Bede is one of those noiseless, light-footed mortals, who come and go without your "Nay" or "Yea." She glides through a room like a shadow—portly, no doubt, yet devoid of sound; she enters in like sort.

Paulina claps both her hands to her head—that aches, and burns, and throbs—convulsively exclaims, "What have I done? What have I done?"

The poor little soul falls to sobbing again as if her heart would break; while o'er her the good jasmine pours its divine odor, and the kindly roses nod in at her through the open window. But what recks Paulina of either jasmine or rose? Her young soul is full of the grievous, corroding cares, wants, and sorrows of this world. No lingering sweetness of flowers shall satisfy her—no tender voice of human sympathy; all she craves, hungers for, is love, love, love!

Like *Juliet*, she puts forth the arms of her soul, and says:—

"Oh for a falconer's voice,
To lure this tassel gentle back again!"

This is her mood, and herewith is she plagued.

It is a sunny day at Dummersmede. The larks soar high 'neath a dazzling heaven. All the earth smiles, and Paulina Perrers, a toy Japanese parasol in her hand, reclines idly on a garden seat, a volume of verse on her knee, immersed, apparently, in anything save reading; even thinking seems too much of a toil. Paulina is very happy, despite her air of languor. This is the first morning she has felt really well. Mystic shibboleth, so full of meaning. Not that she has been ill, but the world has seemed a dreary abiding-place.

Now to-day all is changed. By five Paulina was awake; by seven she was down. Great pleasure she seemed to know betided her. Something good was going to happen. What that something good might be she never stayed to inquire. She is sick of inquiring; nothing ever comes of it, save heart-burning. So why?—why?—why? The earth is fair, let us be glad thereof. In this mood of idle content rests Paulina.

Noon leans upon the hills. The day has attained its zenith, and over Miss Perrers, in common with all else, steals a delicious feeling of profound repose. If not on the eve of dropping off into a doze, she is something very like it—bordering, shall we say, on the land of Nod. Nay, this might be the very land of Nod itself, so still is it—so hushed and slumberful.

But Paulina's dreams are not destined to be of long duration. On her flagging ears suddenly strike voices and laughter.

"This way!" Oh, what a bore! With a loathly sigh, Paulina opens her reluctant eyes. Some wretched people come to call. Why couldn't they let her be? Why must they hunt her out? Then just a little thought darts into her mind—a faint pink steals to her cheeks. She exhibits marked symptoms of renewed vitality, changes her posture, pats and straightens her petticoats.

Hark, though! That is Lady Caversham's voice. No mistaking her high-pitched, rather unmelodious accents. What can she be talking so vociferously about? Something to do with herself, of course. Catch her displaying that amount of interest in aught else!

"Yes; wasn't it odd?" exclaims she. "Quite a coincidence! I was so surprised!"

Paulina's lip curls. She is young in years, but her mind is not wholly unformed, and she entertains a very cordial contempt for women like her ladyship, who make their husbands' name and fame the cloak of countless depravities that would utterly blast and ruin one less effectually protected.

But aversion, well seasoned though it be, brooks scant indulgence.

"I told you we should find her here," exclaims Athel, bending to draw aside the hanging trails of a luxuriant Banksia rose that curtains off the lawn. "There you are, Paulina!" triumphantly.

With forced good grace Miss Perrers rises to welcome this gay group, among whom, however, she fails to discern the one face her eyes crave a sight of.

Lady Caversham, Miss Lunelle, the two Vanes, and a host of others. Paulina's heart sinks. Have they come to take the place by storm? Do they intend to stay to tea? What is the meaning of this unwonted parade? Dummersmede seems quite invaded.

"You are not looking at all well, dear," says her ladyship, greetings having been exchanged.—Lady Caversham is just one of those nice, kind little women who are so fond of telling you this sort of thing. "I am afraid you mope."

"Mope!" laughs Paulina, who can parry a thrust as well as any one. "Why should I? What have I to mope about?"

"Oh, I am sure I don't know," smiles the Countess. "Poor Miles—isn't it sad?—his horse fell with him the other day, two days ago, and dislocated his right shoulder. Awfully bad for him, isn't it? I came over to tell you the news."

Paulina turns deathly pale.

"I declare, Paulina is going to cry!" exclaims Bessie Vane, who, owing to the fact of old and much-enduring friendship, esteems herself privileged to say what she likes.

Paulina flushes rose-red; Lady Caversham gives vent to a short, rather scornful laugh. She dislikes girls, particularly girls whose good looks entitle them to consideration.

"What a feather in Leycester's cap!" says she.

"Paulina is not very strong," observes Athel, gravely. He has no fancy to see his gentle, winning, innocent little cousin exposed to the bitter pleasantries of a tribe of painted women, with voices like macaws and tongues like razors. "Anything startles her. Now what do you say to a game of lawn tennis?"

CHAPTER VII.

COMPLETELY CAUGHT.

It is the third appearance of Mariana, the singer who throws such a glamour over all

men, and who, so report avers, has wedded an earl, and jilted a duke, and is, besides, the boast and scourge of goodness knows how many others.

Mariana sings, as it is her nature to sing, in accordance with the more vital instincts of a free, unfettered soul. Each night she entrances willing audiences, and each night returns home, her ears ringing with the plaudits of an enthusiastic public, more than ever convinced of the thorough worthlessness of her career, however brilliant, however alluring. For this woman's heart is restless, just as is Paulina's, lying half asleep on her sunny bench.

Ah! cynics, disbelieve me, an ye will, the old gods retain their thrones. Paulina longs for love. Yet she has wealth, that all men seek. Mariana, her deep eyes full of tears, figures love as she has seen it painted, away in her own sunny land, as she has heard it sung both here and everywhere. Yet it comes not her way—the love she craves—the whole great, perfect love!

There are peasant wives sitting by their humble hearths, that have this in their hands—that nightly rest, blest in its prized possession. "Oh, am not I as good as these?" cries Mariana, her noble brow bowed on the sparse covering of her little bed—for this lady sleeps hard, in memory of those harsh days when parentage wrought evil emblems on her soul.

A Thursday night in June, a night of roses. Even in the dusty purlieus of London town by courtesy termed suburbs, yet savoring little enough of aught suburban, a subtle blossoming fragrance seems to pervade the arid air; nay, above the steamy reek of many a crowded London street rises the faint, sweet odors of crushed flowers, piled high on the hucksters' baskets, or sadly faded and worn in costers' carts.

It is just one of those evenings, exquisitely clear, lustrous pure, when, still pulsing with the more passionate echoes of the day, flushed with the tide of life, one is apt to be beset by a strange desire to sally forth in quest of the beautiful—to lay one's tribute, all humble though it be, on the shrine of that eternal beauty, the sole source of truth and faith throughout the world—verily, the light that lighteth men. Something of this sort of feeling may have crept over Athel Bede, as he sat sipping his Beaune, and gazing away steadily at the glorious amber radiance shed by a slowly declining sun, at the open window of his pleasant bachelor abode, beneath which flows, at some distance, the now glorified river.

Athel has been in town two days. He came up ostensibly on business—to see the family lawyer, and transact some necessary affairs pressed on his attention by Mrs. Bede, in view of his approaching marriage; she cannot be induced to relinquish so favorite a project, despite the self-evident difficulties that lie in the way.

Rather weary of the home-life which, despite its attractions, still is open to a charge of sameness, Athel chose sooner to waive argument than contest the question, so here he is in full enjoyment of all London has to offer either in the way of luxury or amusement.

But Athelstane Bede is pre-eminently a quiet man. If he had any follies to accuse himself of, those were determinately shelved long ago in his salad days, therefore when he is in London he clings to his usual habits, dines staidly and simply at home in preference to going to his club, or taxing his powers of digestion at a restaurant.

Thus it happened on the night in question that, having concluded his modest repast, he betook himself, with the wine, to the window, and there sat, as I say, gazing forth, lost in dreamy enjoyment. Whether this led to the facts I am about to record, I cannot take upon myself to determine.

It is possible that, having in a measure undermined the solid foundations of reality by plunging into the region of chromatic splendor, he may have, as it were, conjured up the

mood most favorable to the engendering of romance. Be this as it may, stirred by an unaccountable impulse, he suddenly abandons the Burgundy, rises from his seat, rings the bell, and bidding his man call a cab, makes up his mind that he will see, hear, and enjoy the new opera to-night—the new opera, “Zizza,” that everybody is talking—nay, raving about.

Of the new singer he thinks nothing. Very likely he barely recollects her name. He has seen it on the bills, and the last time he dined at Whiteladies, to which select abode of the graces men are oftener wont to find their way than women, some one was saying she deserved her success; but Dammersmede is a good way off town, in the heart of a midland county, and the glare of London barely irradiates its horizon.

Little by little the glamour of the June sunset fades, the streets grow dusk, and only a vague luminance serves to remind the eyes of its late pleasure. A change takes place in Mr. Bede's mood. He wonders why he let himself be so easily stirred. He even tells himself it was weak. What is there in a sunset to turn a man's brain? He intended to write a few letters, and then look in on an old friend, Brandreth, of Oriel, who has chambers in the Temple, and is always good for a chat.

There is something feeble about being swayed hither and thither, the unresisting creature of impulse. However, here one is in the midst of the clatter, and confusion, and uproar of Covent Garden, so one had better make the best of it, and try to be satisfied. As Athel's hansom essays to make its way beneath that time-honored and, one may say, time-illustrated portal, it narrowly escapes coming into collision with an adjacent brougham, whose inmate, probably scared by the impending catastrophe, rashly, it must be confessed, puts out her head.

Athel's somewhat critical eye rests on that fair face an instant—long enough, however, to convince him of its exceeding fairness.

“How very lovely!” is his immediate comment—mental, of course; and for the first time these twenty minutes he does not regret having come.

The aspect of things seemed changed. He feels content, and only because he happens to have caught sight of certain features. Athel thinks, when he can think—has seated himself in his stall, regained partially the use of his ordinary faculties—Athel thinks he must be going mad, for he is no crazy beauty-worshiper. He has even before now contemplated marrying quite a plain woman, who struck him as being “nice,” and now on two separate occasions he had been guilty of enthusiasm. It is too absurd.

Up goes the curtain, revealing a not too crowded house. Athel honors it with a half contemptuous glance. He sees no one he knows. The first act promises to be particularly uninteresting, when, on a sudden, Mariana appears. Athel sits spell-bound, “Mariana, Mariana!” is all his heart cries.

For the first time in his life, and he verges on the fatal three, Athelstane Bede is fairly bewitched. Mariana has come down to the footlights; she stands, her beautiful face slightly upraised, delivering, with marvelous grace, the last thrilling notes of the first great song—their eyes meet; a glance of swift recognition flashes, for an instant, from beneath those ivory lids.

They have never met before, but she sees in him her deliverer—he who is to free her from this life of shame! How dare she affirm as much? Mariana is not wont to be afraid of daring. She knows it, that is all.

The curtain down, Athel rises—with an unsteady hand seeks his hat. Had he taken too much wine his brain could scarce be in a worse state of confusion. He barely preserves self-command. What did she mean?—what is her wish? Ordinarily phlegmatic enough, Athel feels there is nothing he would not venture, nothing he would not risk, to win a smile or fair word of hers.

“How do you do, Bede?”

He becomes aware that he has been staring like a fool.

“Oh, Brandreth,” exclaims he, with rather a weak assumption of pleased surprise—for, to tell the truth, he is hardly in the mood to be communicative—“is that you? I was going to look in at your place this evening.”

“Well, it's lucky you didn't,” says Brandreth, a little, square-shouldered man, with rather an ill-tempered expression, good-looking on a scale only suited to a Hercules; “because, you know, you're much better here. Mariana's a fine singer, isn't she?”

“Very,” replies Athel, quickly; and then turns to survey the house, now crammed to suffocation. He is as loth to hear this woman's charms discussed as though she were his relative—some one in whom he felt an active, even a personal interest. Yet what is she to him?—what, indeed, more than to any one of this herd—this idle, captious, somewhat brainless herd?

Athel Bede feels that he is drifting further and further from the path of sanity, that he is becoming more and more hopelessly involved in meshes woven by his own morbid self-consciousness. Vague thoughts of spending the remainder of the night in wild debauchery, if only to shock himself back to sense and reason, cross his brain. But if evil ever seems repugnant it seems so now, in the presence of her, this peerless being.

But no second glance of thrilling import repays his rapt attention. Mariana seems quite absorbed in her *role*, and even betrays an anxiety to acquit herself with an effect that almost amounts to nervousness.

The truth is, her nerves are slightly shaken, owing to a variety of circumstances. Paulo Rocco, who but this moment strolled into the stalls, appropriating a vacant seat a little to the right of and just behind Athel—Paulo, I say, came to her dressing-room between the acts, and displayed very decided ill-humor, for no reason apparently.

Something has occurred to vex him, doubtless. His face is dark as any thundercloud, and his words neither too courteous nor too few. Now he scowls at the stage as though he would awe it into silence.

His humor is not akin to pleasure. “What's all that trumpery?” coarsely demanded he, flinging aside a mass of delicate, shimmering silk and lace that occupied the seat whereon he chose to be seated.

Now, if anything is calculated to provoke a woman, it is this species of brutality. Though we go without food to eat, we must have those things.

Mariana's eyes brightened. She bit her lips to keep down the angry retort that strove for utterance.

“Such folly!” pursued Rocco, stubbornly lashing himself into a fury. For what was there to quarrel about? Is she not meek? Is she not the most yielding of lovers? But hard words and bickering have been frequent between them lately. There will be a fine scene when they reach her house to night. The Count has elected to take up his abode at the Villa Zizza during the last fortnight—a proceeding scarcely calculated to add to the comfort of its inmates, for Rocco has a very violent temper, the which he never attempts to curb, save when his interest demands a show of urbanity.

Attached to him as she is, with the fond foolish strength of attachment of a woman who knows she loves unworthily—perhaps the tenderest love of all, pity blending with and mellowing passion—Mariana is bound to own silently, in the solitude of her own heart, that it had been well for her, perhaps, had Rocco never crossed her path—had she never hearkened to his wooing voice as they sat together that evening at Torrento, beneath the orange boughs and palms, and pledged each other undying faith and deathless constancy.

Peace?—alas! that seems fled for aye. And this is the woman who so impatiently longed

for the arrival of this very man she would now fain be quit of at any cost.

Paulo Rocco has himself to blame. He has wielded the power placed in his hands wrongfully. He has battered the face of his Ideal. He has ceased to be the suppliant, and assumed the attitude of master. Now he rules in Mariana's house with an iron hand, scarce justifiable were he indeed its legal lord, but under the present aspect of the case simply intolerable. No wonder she is tired of beholding him. No wonder she longs to shake him off. No wonder, either, that somewhat of this inclination should betray itself in her face, her tone, or that the same becoming apparent to Rocco, he should resent it, and behave all the worse.

A sad position of affairs—one to weigh down the heart, especially of a sunshine-loving, susceptible, quick-natured woman like Mariana. At times it seems to her that her life is altogether too intolerable; that she must make a desperate struggle, and be rid of Rocco at all hazards. But, alas! the wings so strong to bear one upward are all powerless to bend the stout bars of the cage.

Mariana, who once sung free as any linnet, now knows herself a poor captive. Are her notes as sweet and strong? May be. May be even the anguish of the thought lends extra, more piercing beauty to her voice. But it is beauty bought too dear. It involves the sacrifice of life.

Athel sits the opera out, and submits to being bored by the somewhat maudlin remarks of his friend. “However could I have thought that fellow amusing?” mentally comments he, reviewing a specially inane remark. It is almost inconceivable. Athel, however, is fast verging on that condition when all men seem in the eyes of man detestable, for the simple reason that woman alone is dight of charm. It is the premonitory symptom of something worse—namely, the birth of a devouring and, in all probability, purely irrational passion. But a symptom it is, which declaration you are quite at liberty to take for what it is worth.

The grand tableau in course of completion, Athel arises to resume his coat. As he does so, Count Rocco, who occupies an adjacent stall, quickly turns his head, honors him with a gloomy stare.

Paulo conceives himself the bounden guardian of Mariana's interests, and, consequently, the sworn foe of all who, by either word or deed, wittingly or unwittingly, evince the least inclination to mar her triumphs.

“Hog!” mutters he, between his teeth, albeit Athel is about as un-piglike as can possibly be imagined; being, indeed, the very picture of a well-bred young gentleman, affording a striking contrast in this particular to Rocco himself, who, for all his fine jewelry and spurious air of fashion, very strikingly resembles the circus rider of ordinary experience.

As the great singer—her lovely face rather pale owing to her recent exertions, which have been immense—in her hand one of the bouquets, composed entirely of roses, that are being hurriedly gathered up by the attendants, crosses the stage to acknowledge the redoubled plaudits of her hearers, her eyes again seek out Athel.

The blood rushes to that fair brow—like a girl's for whiteness. Again Mr. Bede experiences that strange, suffocating sensation that oppressed him when last those magic orbs met his.

Rocco notes this. He eyes Athel again; this time not quite so contemptuously, yet with evident disfavor.

Then the uproar ceases; the house slowly disgorges itself.

“Well, what do you think of it?” says Brandreth, inserting his little podgy hands in his trowser pockets, and assuming a free and easy air of lightsome criticism.

“I like it immensely,” replies Athel, buttoning his coat.

“Come and have a smoke,” genially. “I'll introduce you to a lot of nice fellows.”

“No, thank you,” says Athel; “another

night. I'm up in town for some time, so no doubt we shall meet again."

Arrived in his own pleasant room, so favorable to reflection and the growth of thought, out of the question in crowded London streets, Athel Bede sits him down; takes out his pipe, fills it, and prepares candidly to review his position.

He is not a man to flinch from consequences, however alarming, and recognizes with fatal clearness that for the first time in his life he loves. At length on his actual vision has dawned her whose affection would hallow time and grace eternity.

Athel believes in biology. He, in a vague, roundabout way, will admit that it is not altogether impossible a marriage may here and there be made in heaven. Whether its attributes are adapted to earth is a very different matter, but in the beginning its source may be celestial.

Entertaining these views, and conceiving that they alone present the true and valid idea of matrimony, it is not wonderful that Mr. Bede should have been all along strenuous in his endeavors to keep at arm's length the insidious snare.

"Good heavens!" sighs he, "imagine if this had happened after instead of before! What boundless misery might have ensued!"

For Athel Bede is not the man to weed a rebellious impulse out of his heart. That heart beats too quick and strong.

Men there are who can crush any instinct, turn a deaf ear to the most imperative demand. They are simply too cold to harbor passion, too dull to apprehend or appreciate sentiment. Gain in them runs riot.

"I must find out more about her," reflects Mr. Bede; "who she is, and what manner of life she leads. Not that she can be aught but pure, that I swear. I will not be led by the assertions of fools. I will see and know for myself."

Then he knocks the ashes out of his pipe—looks mighty grave.

Catching sight of the clock with his warning face, "Heigho!" exclaims he; "past three, as I live! Late—late; too late!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A FLOWERY FORTUNE.

THE immediate result of Captain Leycester Miles's accident is to detain him at Whiteladies, consequently in the vicinity of Paulina Perrers, much longer than at first seemed likely to contemplate! For Miles is one of those men who seek relief from care in action. No mere carpet knight, to sit and brood over his position, which, to tell the truth, has become disagreeably complicated since his arrival in these parts.

Overloaded with attention both by Lilla and Lady Caversham, whose assiduity he has, perhaps, rather more right to look for, owing to the nature of their intimacy and the duration of their friendship. Miles, during these long hours he necessarily spends alone, has plenty of time accurately to realize the crudities of his lot, and even devise means whereby he may compass its speedy amelioration.

Without any serious intent, yet with some show of set purpose, Captain Miles has let himself drift into something very like a serious entanglement with Agnes Caversham, who is quick enough to perceive a man's weakness, and divert it to her own uses. Supposing that man possessed of certain physical attractions, Lilla, too, is always ready to aid and abet her in any scheme of the sort; so between them they have contrived to mesh Leycester in about as inextricable a tangle of wild hypothesis as ever rendered a brave man's life miserable.

Not that he means to be led captive. He intends to make at least one grand struggle for liberty so soon as he shall have regained freedom of action. But this is scarcely the time, when he is the recipient of such marked kindness, that were the underlying motive any but that it obviously is—namely, a desire to keep

him silent out of sheer gratitude, to rivet, so to speak, his chains—the minds of the most callous must be affectionately stirred.

Leycester writhes under the infliction of all these honeyed smiles—these regretful courtesies. They, as it were, plant stings in his wound, for they remind him of his slavery, and bid him recollect.

Life from Leycester Miles's angle had attained a sufficiently somber hue, when on his vision burst Paulina—emblem in his eyes of all that was sweet and pure. Her artless prattle pleased him; the tones of her delicious young voice conveyed a subtle sense of rest. He laved himself in her sweet innocence as in a cleansing stream; in a word, was in a fair way to fall in love wholesomely and healthfully for perhaps the second time in his life—salad love is pretty sure to be fairly honest, if a trifle green—when that confounded stirrup-leather broke; and, lo and behold!—here he found himself, a prey to remorse—a prisoner, racked with incessant pain. Perhaps the anxiety with which he looks forward to convalescence retards its approach.

It is no satisfaction to find that Lady Caversham spends nearly all her spare time by his bedside.

"Leycester," she will say, reproachfully surveying the recumbent giant, "I do believe you are only longing to get away."

"Say get well," rejoins he, "and you will be nearer the truth."

For, as a matter of fact, he does not wish to leave the neighborhood; he only wishes to be strong and his own master, and able to sun himself to his heart's content in the shy, sweet smiles of Paulina Perrers.

Leycester Miles is not what you may term a veteran. The blood pulses gayly in him still; still a good span of well-filled time lies between him and that. Miles has just caught a glimpse of the shady side of thirty. The sun streaming full on that wondrous beard will reveal here and there a silvery streak.

"Another year or two of this life I lead," grimly reflected he, moodily eying himself in the glass, "and I shall be gray!"

Not a pleasant thought for a man who rather prides himself on juvenescence. But the age is a trying one, and tests us to our uttermost, particularly at close quarters.

Miles, however, does not mean to pursue this life. He means to pull up, and steady down. How he will succeed, we shall see.

Paulina has been to the mill. She has left behind substantial tokens, in the shape of a big bunch of hot-house flowers, and a parcel of books, of her very marked liking, for little Rose, the worthy miller's lame daughter. She has stood on the bridge and idly watched the forget-me-not blossoms sail away peacefully on the glassy bosom of the strong current. She has watched the eddies in the shallows, and the dragon-flies disporting themselves on the bank. She has even picked a spray or two of plump meadow-sweet, and made feeble efforts to capture an arrowhead, all but precipitating herself into the stream thereby. Yet pleasure lags. She can feel nothing but gloomy and discontented, and, I fear, a little ill-natured; till all of a sudden, some one says, in deep, mellow tones, "Miss Perrers, I had no idea you frequented this haunt. You look like the tutelary deity of the brook."

It is Leycester Miles, his hand on a stick, his face considerably paler and thinner than before that unlucky mishap. All the handsomer, perhaps, for now you can see how really fine his great, gray eyes are; how clearly cut and accurately molded are his frank yet aristocratic features. Paulina looks up at him. She thinks she never saw so dear a face—a face you could worship. Remember, I am only telling you just what passes through her mind. The prey of impulse, she is scarcely likely to be more reasonable about this than most things. Miles smiles. He, for his part, thinks he has never seen so innocent a creature—she is simplicity incarnate. After a London season, too. Truly there must be something very

good about this girl, or she could not have walked in the fire thus unscathed.

Now we know that here Leycester harbors a great illusion. We know that Paulina is nothing in the world except an ordinarily good-hearted, sufficiently truthful, fairly ingenuous English girl. Or, is there a touch of poetry in the child's character that escapes us, that needs the eye of love to call it forth? Who shall say? May not this selfsame attribute be the secret of that indefinable yet mutual attraction that irresistibly welds souls together?

Well, Leycester stands looking at Paulina, and she stands looking at him, and they both simultaneously acknowledge that no other sight could be so well worth seeing.

"You are out early, Miss Perrers," says he. It is not much past ten.

"So are you, Captain Miles," replies she.

"Oh, yes. It is such a relief to escape from that eternal sick-room. I wish to make the most of my opportunities," with a speaking glance. Miles is by no means above availing himself of whatever luck befalls.

That is just what Agnes Caversham says. "Why could he not let one be? Surely he does not pretend that I ran after him?"

Yet that is what Miles does pretend—and pretend roundly, too. And, on the surface, it seems likely enough, one must admit.

Well, Paulina stands a little bashful, for all her London experiences, surveying her tiny foot, shod in the daintiest manner. Paulina's feet are marvels.

Anon she says, plucking up courage, "Would you like to walk through our wilderness, Captain Miles? It is pretty—at least, some people think so."

"No doubt I shall," promptly returns he. "Thank you very much. It will be extremely pleasant."

The gate leading to that delicious jungle of shrubs and forest trees is no great way off.

Presently they traverse a winding path, bordered on one side by a wood, on the other by huge yews, that clothe the shelving slope that screens Dummersmede, set in a hollow between two hills. That may, perhaps, account for its dreamy stillness.

"All this goes to your cousin, does it not?" observes Miles, as they stroll on.

"I believe so," modestly replies Paulina, who, though as happy as ever she was in her whole life, will not let herself know it. "That is, grandmamma can do as she pleases. But I believe she intends it for Athel."

"I used to know Bede pretty well at one time," says Captain Miles, pausing to admire the view. A lovely expanse of shimmering light caught sight of through a deftly-contrived cleft—the craftsman's hand has been at work here, lopping and hewing. "He and I, indeed, were something like friends."

"Ar'n't you friends now?" involuntarily thinks Paulina. "How is your arm?" hazards she, at length, conscious of a slight stiffness; and then absurdly adds, "Athel is in London."

"Oh, is he?" exclaims Miles. "You see, I have so long been a prisoner. I am quite out of the running. What a beautiful place this is! I like it better than Whiteladies."

"So do I," replies Paulina, innocently. "But then," with a laugh, "that is only natural. Whiteladies, though, always strikes me as too formal; too—what shall I say?"

"Artificial," responds Leycester, mentally contrasting Agnes Caversham's rouge and powder with the fresh, youthful loveliness of the girl by his side.

Something of this strikes her; she blushes hotly.

"Will you come further?" she says; they have reached the low wicket-gate that bars the private way. "Grandmamma is in, I believe."

"No, thanks," says he. "The truth is," with a slight air of embarrassment, gazing at his stick, "I'm booked for a drive. Agnes—I mean Lady Caversham—is going over to Spinholme, and is not quite sure whether she can manage the fresh pony."

"And are you strong enough to help her?" darts to the lips of Paulina before she has time to check herself.

Miles shrugs his shoulders.

Nevertheless, his glance is warm, the handshake vouchsafed at parting sufficiently emphatic to still even that restless maiden's fanciful self-questionings.

"He loves me," says she, to the petals of a rose—"loves me not!" and having got to the end of the riddle, finds "He loves!"

Kind rose!

CHAPTER IX.

FAIRLY AROUSED.

AHEL continues his visits to the opera every time the great *prima donna* sings. Lesser lights do now and then occasionally appear, only to twinkle fitfully, and go out, or reappear in the guise of wandering fires in other lands—sufficiently remote, be it said, from the center of intellectual brilliance. He takes his seat regularly as clockwork. His passion has not decreased one whit—nay, it has acquired strength by constant gazing on the beauty of her he idolizes.

Yet, think, and think, study and puzzle his brain as Athel will, he cannot light on the means whereby he is to make himself known to Mariana, with even the faintest chance of awakening her regard. For what is he to her, seated in that particular seat, any more than the thousand and one other sufficiently well-dressed, well-looking do-nothings who nightly crowd to applaud her efforts?

"I want her to know me," groans poor Athel. "She desires sympathy, intelligence, a purer and truer love than any of them have it in their power to offer."

Thus Athelstane, in the solitude of his moonlit chamber.

The summer wanes. Still he stays on, to the wonder of his mother, and, indeed, every one who knows him. For Mr. Bede is commonly affirmed "pertickler fond of the country—a real country gentleman, such as you don't often see nowadays."

But the opera will soon be over. Both houses close next week; possibly one will keep open a little longer than the other, in the hope of attracting a few stray country cousins, but Mariana will not appear; so a certain country cousin, of whom we may boast some slight knowledge, will not be among that mixed assemblage. No: Athel must surely return home before long, resume sensible habits, and be as he has ever been—a model son, landlord, and general overseer of people's rights.

As for Mrs. Bede, she is smitten with amazement to find that he can remain absent so long. She thought the place and the people had more hold on him. Hold, alas! they have none; that has been utterly swept away, under the overpowering sway of imperious passion, overwhelming desire to see and hold converse with and gaze into the eyes of a woman who may be no better than she should be, or an angel, who shall say?

Any way, Athel's long stay in town sorely troubles Mrs. Bede, more particularly as this handsome captain still infests the neighborhood. She wishes he would come home. Nay, she writes letters by almost every post, intimating the said wish. Still he lingers. What can it be? What wonderful attraction can the man have found—he who used to vote London dull—"the stupidest place under the sun?"

"One would think," writes the poor lady, quite at her wit's-end, "that you had fallen in love—you, who commonly vow yourself adamant."

"Poor mother!" smiles Athel, as he scans the thin lilac sheet. Mrs. Bede always writes on lilac paper—it is a fad of hers. "She little thinks how near that is to the truth."

And then he sighs—for, love or no love, Mariana seems far off as ever.

Yet not for want of seeking. Mr. Bede has ever been weak enough to wend his way more than once to that not-too-deserted suburb, rend-

ered illustrious, for the time being, by the fact of the great singer having elected there to take up her abode, ensconced among flowering shrubs, and secure in the enjoyment of an ever-increasing popularity.

What good Athel thinks can possibly be achieved by wildly wandering in that perfumed region, I am at a loss to imagine. Perhaps, afflicted by the nameless craving of the lovesick, it affords him some slight satisfaction to know his feet have at least trod the path her dainty little feet must traverse when she seeks her carriage, or sallies forth.

Plunged in melancholy and ever-growing self-distrust, that, pushed much further, will threaten sanity, this unhappy young man never dares lift his eyes to the windows of that snug retreat. That would, according to his code, be an unpardonable impertinence, and could lead to nothing over and above the somewhat too frequent sight of a becapped housemaid. Therefore he moodily wanders on.

To-day, however, he feels in a slightly blither mood.

Kicking off his slippers, having concluded breakfast, scanned the papers, three in number, that lie neatly strewn about the floor, and generally aired himself, he rings the bell for his man—a dapper personage, who has not been with him very long, but who thoroughly understands his business—bids that functionary get his things, and makes up his mind to take a good long walk.

Now, walking in London, save when the outcome of either pleasure or excitement, must be pretty generally admitted a failure. The ordinary diurnal trudge round squares of depressing sameness, and streets of sickening vulgarity, cannot be held productive of aught save melancholy.

Ahel is quite alive to this. He holds, moreover, that a walk, to be a success, should possess an object, a distinct aim, the accomplishment of which should furnish it with gist and backbone.

Thus he makes up his mind that he will this very morning make a fourth pilgrimage to the Villa Zizza—will walk every step of the way (a good five miles or more); and then, having solaced his soul with a sense—if sense only—of the shrine of his ideal (now, doubtless, all mantled with roses and flowerful clematis—even as is his own home)—the poor mother—But there is no help for it; a man's heart will have its say—well, ultimately he will return (wholesomely tired, it is to be hoped), dine, rest, and then proceed to tire himself still further by going to the opera to hear "Fidelio," for which classic work he entertains something very like vivid enthusiasm, and whose beauties will to-night be still further enhanced, if possible, by the genius of her to whose lot it falls to act as their loyal interpretrix.

All this Athel rapidly revolves in his busy mind, the while the said man—Oswald by name—imagines Mr. Bede thoroughly occupied in surveying the set of his collar and the effect of his buttonhole; for Athel is crazily fond of flowers, and can no more endure to be deprived of that matutinal adornment than to wear dirty gloves or drink bad claret—claret, by the way, is all he does drink, keeping his brain cool and his nerves taut, despite whatever you may think to the contrary. Athel is wise in his generation in some ways, if a born fool in others.

The morning is brilliantly bright. The sun does not just shine; it lends a sparkle to each ray. London seems pervaded by a buoyant sense of vitality, very different from the dull, weary-eyed place it mostly is.

Ahel walks briskly; the pavement beneath his feet feels elastic, as though the very paving-stones were suddenly endowed with life, like heather or the crisp yielding turf of an old mossy lawn.

Enjoyment abounds.

Now and then the thought crosses our wayfarer that surely such pleasurable sensations must betoken luck.

Imagine if she were to recognize him—he,

her so ardent admirer, so constant in his place, so earnest in his regards—speak, moved by the sunshine! Stranger things have happened; to wit, Cophetua and the beggar-maid.

Ahel quickens his pace, as though he were on his way to meet good fortune. Even his ordinarily composed features take a more smiling look. The air exhilarates like champagne. Paradise lurks in its soft kiss.

Arrived at the turning that leads to the bourne of his hurried yet joyous ramble, Athel pauses to draw breath; for he has really walked fast, and ever faster, and the day is warm.

As he takes out his handkerchief to mop his glowing brow, a man not ten paces off honors him with a cool, comprehensive stare.

"Deuce take the fellow's impudence!" mentally comments Athel, returning the same with interest.

A shadow of a smile infests that coarse mouth. Paulo Rocco is in a bad humor, and will not mind what he does, provided his ire can vent itself. He hates Athel, and is burning to strike the first blow.

However, he cannot very well attack even a detested rival in the open street for no worse offense than fanning his face.

"Effeminate idiot!" comments the Count.

Not so effeminate as you think, good Signor Paulo. Put him on his mettle, and try what he is worth.

With a midnight scowl, Rocco resumes his way, that leads to the villa, need one add?

Ahel follows at a slower pace. He is a shade tired, and the man's manner has puzzled him; for he knows his face well, and is at a loss to account for so singular an exhibition of bad feeling.

Slowly climbing the hill, crowned by a handsome church, whose golden weather-cock gleams in the strong light, Athel turns the corner. At that instant the garden door of La Villa Zizza slams. Count Rocco has reached home.

Callous to the fact, or, perhaps—and this I believe to be the truth—ignorant thereof, Athel crosses the road. The sunshine has fired his blood.

Out pounces Paulo, the savagery of a tiger in his air, the venom of an inflamed and vindictive man stamped in his countenance.

"You here!" cries he, shaking his fist. "Think you I have not seen? Think you that I am not aware? Here I rule. No one—no one shall dare infest these premises!"

"Monsieur," smiles Athel, "you slightly transgress the ordinary usages of society in thus trying to force a quarrel on an inoffensive stranger. However, sooner than—"

"You are not inoffensive!" shouts Rocco. "You are detestable! Have we not wrangled about you? Have we not—ah, yes! Ah, I will have your life!" making a ferocious spring.

But before that savage clutch could find a hold, Athelstane Bede's powerful hand has alighted on Count Paulo's arm. Transfixed as in a vice, he rages helplessly.

With a glance of utter scorn that might well wither one less hardened in contumely, Athel hurls the fellow from him, and walks on.

Cursing low beneath his breath, Rocco re-enters the house.

You may imagine the kind of luncheon he and Mariana share. It is indeed a feast of death. From it she rises bathed in tears, nor do her eyes assuage their torrents till, wearied out, scarce able to stand, her maid assures her she has not a moment to spare if she would dress in time for the theater.

She has thrown herself on her bed, all regardless of costume, so profound, so utter is her misery.

Sinking into a chair, she submits to be arrayed. Who, I wonder, in the whole wide world, ever saw on that lovely face so sad a look—nay, not sad only, dejected, downtrodden? Why, people would laugh, would mock at and crown you for the veriest fool did you venture any such assertion. Thus the world, that is so very knowing concerning the things it deems affect it.

Considerably nettled by what he considers, and rightly, an act of atrocious insolence, and one that irrevocably consigns its perpetrator to the lowest grade of ruffianism, yet by no means deprived of his normal self-control, Athel is quite cool enough to reason the matter out, and decide even on its legal merits—amply sufficient ground for an action for assault and battery, although the amount of personal damage inflicted may be set down as nil—Mr. Bede, however, has no intention of pressing this point, but quietly determines that so far from being deterred by this unpleasant incident from displaying further interest in the lovely *prima donna*, he will this very night occupy his accustomed stall, and should she seem cognizant of his presence—oh, blissful thought!—be in no wise backward to testify his sense of the favor.

Athel Bede is just one of those men whom opposition renders all the more valiant. It is indeed quite possible that he might in time have awakened to the budding charms of little Paulina; for the child is lovely and lovable enough had she not been so persistently what is termed “thrust down his throat” by dear, injudicious, kind old Mrs. Bede.

It was the sense that he might at any moment marry Miss Perrers that incited this perverse young man to make up his mind he would never marry Miss Perrers at all—that, so far as he was concerned, she might enjoy single blessedness all her life. Not much chance of that, Mr. Athel. If you are blind to the charms of youth, beauty, and wealth, others there are possessed of keener sensibilities.

Having, however, solaced his soul, somewhat rudely abraded one must admit, by a plunge into a cool swimming-bath, a leisurely drink, and a cigar, Athel proceeded to dress, dine, and generally equip himself for the evening’s campaign. That is how he views it, for, silent rivals hitherto, all the bitter animosity of an unspoken hate gradually springing up, now that a collision has actually taken place, the spark been ignited that is to set all the smoldering mass ablaze, something must come of it. Even surface tranquillity can no longer be preserved.

What will come of it is more than Athel can determine. He has not the gift to dive into futurity and wrest thence its mysteries. But of one thing he is very sure—namely that he will not be the first to assume the role of aggressor. Moreover, that should he be attacked, he will, in this instance, lose no time in standing on the defensive, and inflicting on his assailant “a precious good thrashing,” if needs be.

Indeed, Athel clenches his fist and stiffens the muscles of his left arm in a manner that, could Count Rocco witness it, might go some way to mitigate his martial ardor, at that moment considerably inflamed by sundry huge bumpers of beady French wine, imbibed beneath the hospitable roof of the Villa Zizza—once the abode of song and laughter, now given up to the Furies, to dread revenge and sullen hate, so that no pleasant person, of a gay and lightsome air, ever enters it. Its very walls seem to exhale gloom.

“Surely,” reflects Athel, surveying himself—one may pardon him the passing weakness—“surely she cannot be enamored of that rat, as black as a sweep, and about the hight of Tom Thumb? No; the fellow must have got some kind of hold over her. Perhaps he farms her engagements, and deludes her into the belief that without him she would starve.”

A sudden wild longing fires the impulsive breast of Mr. Bede to rush to the rescue of this beauteous creature, to bear her away on the strong wings of love far beyond the reach of debasing influences, where song is free, and life consists of an exquisite mingling of sweet sound and flowers, and the master passion that constitutes its all, where dross is unknown, and gold only pleasurable because it charms the eye. That is what Athel would like to do. But why and wherefore that gusty sigh?

But, hark! Big Ben is booming eight—time to be off.

With just a final glance—the young men of our day can scarcely be held Crichtons in this particular—manly enough, no doubt, but not above an occasional effeminacy—Athel, his dust-coat over his arm—the night is warm—sets out.

Hailing a hansom at his own door, he gets in—bids the man drive to Her Majesty’s.

As he is rapidly jerked and jolted through the bumpy streets—a good-looking, bright-brown animal does his best between the shafts—memory fondly depicts that first meeting.

Athel lives only in the present; indeed, it seems to him, misguided mortal that he is, as though he had never lived at all till now—that his brain has lain inactive, his soul in a state of coma up to that very night.

This conviction lends a wonderful intensity, imparts a strange charm to existence. Everything appears in a new light; fresh meanings crop up; fresh, unfamiliar rays constantly gleam athwart the path once deemed sufficiently well trod.

The worst is, it is only the new that fares thus. The old—all that happened long ago—appears meager in the extreme, made so by force of contrast.

Athel sighs, realizing this, recollecting, moreover, a letter signed “Margaret Bede,” received only this morning; and, sighing, finds himself where he would be—namely, at the portal of the shrine.

A few pretty faces deck the stairs, a bright glance or two is shot at and after Mr. Bede, whereto he is impervious as though clad in some coat of fairy mail. Such is the force of love. The true lover has no eye for any one save his ladye.

She fills the world, is all the world, and that all is adorable. The house is fairly full, for the season is fast progressing to a close. Soon the liquid notes of Mariana will no longer regale the ears of amateurs. What then will be the lot of a certain hot-headed, rash-intentioned young man?

Athel trembles as he contemplates the future; a wide, yawning gulf seems to gape at his feet. Each day, each second brings him a shade nearer its brink, from which he turns shudderingly, sick with dread, mutely praying that from so terrible a fate he may be delivered. Can he scour Europe in chase of his beloved? Why not? People go abroad in the autumn more than at any other season. Why not he, then? Why should the dull voice of reason condemn him to a solitude little short of purgatorial?

It shall not. Athel makes up his mind, has long ago so made it up, I think, to defy Reason and all her works. So far as I am concerned, I am bound to say, in self defense, lest I be thought to sympathize with this wild young man, that I regard his mental condition as replete with symptoms of a most distressing character, calculated to awaken the gravest anxiety in the breasts of those who interest themselves in his career. But he is as he is, and I cannot make him otherwise.

Meanwhile the stage has gradually filled. Tumultuous plaudits greet Mariana, which she acknowledges with fitting grace; but it is pretty generally admitted that Leonora bids fair to be rather a failure. “She lacks the necessary strength for the part,” observes one critic. “She is most distinctly not up to it,” murmurs another, with a slight shrug, as though it were really too great trouble to condemn, which, poor man, is doubtless true, in his case, seeing the thanklessness of the task, and the frequency with which he performs it.

All this apart, certain it is Mariana falls short of her usual level. Even her acting, commonly her strong point, shows little strength or dash. A conscientious artist, she does her best. But it will not come. It is all flat and tame, and any one who could see into the room of this illusrious favorite after the first act would find her bathed in tears, deaf to consolation, overcome with grief.

The truth is, the poor thing is fairly worn out. A prey to tears all the afternoon, she

could barely swallow a mouthful when dinner-time came.

“Have some brandy,” said Paulo, whose heated countenance betrayed the nature of his occupation; “that’ll put you to rights. Sniveling again, I suppose?”

But she shrunk with disgust from the bare thought.

“Not that—not that!” said she. “Anything sooner—even disgrace!”

“Bah! who talks of disgrace?” was the coarse retort. “There’s no such thing for those who believe in themselves.”

A faint smile curved Mariana’s lips. “And in whom no one believes,” she could well have added.

But she was in no mood to bandy words, hard or soft. All she craved was peace. If ever the onus of fame weighed heavily on weak human soul, it does on our *prima donna* tonight.

I think even her mind travels back with a certain fondness to the days of her childhood, when she roamed barefoot through the ilex woods, and drew the water from the well. But that is not to be dreamed of.

“Madame,” says Annette—the astute Annette—“this came a little while ago.”

The girl opens a large morocco case, displays a glittering collar of splendid brilliants.

Annette thinks, “If that does not do a woman good, the medicine is not made that will cure her.”

Perhaps Annette is right. Perhaps pains do exist past cure. Mariana pushes it aside wearily.

“Why do you show me these things?” says she. “You know I hate them.”

Annette upturns her eyes.

Impatiently Athel awaits the rising of the curtain that vails from his eyes all—so it seems to his heated imagination—the world holds good to look upon. He has noticed Mariana’s weariness; her evident depression; and has ascribed it, by dint of that old prescience exercised by the infatuated, to the right cause—namely, distress at Rocco’s conduct, of which she may, for all one knows, have been an actual witness; but which, sooner or later, could not fail to reach her ears, in a garbled form, no doubt, still containing a residuum of truth.

Had Athel been in the slightest degree to blame, he felt he could never forgive himself. As it is, strong in the possession of a proud innocence, he looks confidently round for his rival, and perceives him, not without a slight start of surprise, calmly seated not six seats off, apparently plunged in somber reverie, his head sunk on his bosom, his hands in his trowser pockets—in anything but the attitude conventionally fitted to the occasion.

Resuming his study of the stage, Mr. Bede becomes aware that the *prima donna* is addressing him—yes, him, of a truth—in most impassioned accents, delivered, of course, in strict accordance with the requirements of both time and tune, but full of meaning, nevertheless. The precise drift of this remarkable display Athel is somewhat at a loss to descry, but it is plainly entreaty—that he will go away; that he will refrain from giving further offense; that he will—But no; those notes express pain wrung from a heart already bleeding.

Athel is fairly puzzled. He sits on, for want of knowing what else to do. Besides, I think he feels a little curious as to what will come next. For this is a supreme moment. He has all the sensations of one on whom impends a crisis. Life seems to have attained its apex; for the moment his heart scarce beats, vitality hangs in the balance.

Then that for which he is on the outlook comes to pass. Exhausted by this great effort, Mariana reels, would fall were she not promptly caught in the arms of her stage-lover, the stout and somewhat commonplace Gardolfi, whose demerits have long since attained the notoriety they deserve.

Considerably hampered in his movements by the gorgeous attire in which he suffocates, de-

siring above all things to acquire a reputation for slimness and the possession of modish graces, unkindly denied him by impartial nature, the robust basso presents a grotesque spectacle. Athel could strike the fellow for his clumsiness. Goth, so to maul that loveliest form!

Down comes the curtain on a scene of the utmost confusion, supers crowding round, the orchestra all in an uproar, the audience as well: everywhere an appearance of agitation, combined with those low, murmurous whisperings and rustlings, that betoken the spread of great dismay.

Presently a personage, clad in immaculate evening attire, steps on the stage, and informs the public that, in consequence of Madame Mariana's severe indisposition, he is compelled, greatly to his regret, to announce the performance at an end. Should this, however, be regarded with dissatisfaction, a selection of operatic music will be rendered by the orchestra.

"No, no, no!" roars an enterprising being in the pit; and with some slight expression of dissent on the part of a few ill-regulated nobodies, this opinion gradually gains ground.

Certainly the offer is not a tempting one; neither is the exchange too munificent. Rather puzzled, he is quite resolved not to leave the theater without obtaining tidings of the mistress of his soul; moreover, perceiving that Rocco's stall is empty, Mr. Bede slowly assumes his coat.

He might, of course, scribble a few lines on his card, and ask the bookkeeper to have it forwarded; but then that strikes him rather in the light of an impertinence, and it might expose her to the insults, even violence, of that "low scoundrel."

Unable to solve the problem, Athel at length decides that he will make his way to the stage-door, at which he has before now noticed a certain brougham waiting; and, keeping well in the background, see for himself with his own eyes, supposing she has not already gone, to what extent this unfortunate collapse has affected Mariana. That, at all events, can give no offense.

But Athel, for once, reckons without his host. Just as he has reached the gloomy portal that, with its dismal flickering gas-jet seems to quell the hope and dash the ambition of all who venture across its squalid threshold, Rocco appears, a closely-muffled figure by his side.

Athel feels nonplussed. He cannot well draw back without appearing cowardly—about the very last attitude he desires to assume in her eyes; still less does he wish to provoke a scene. He stands his ground; nay, even bares his head, as though to royalty.

Rocco's fiery eyes light with a savage glare upon that tranquil face, calm as marble, yet instinct with deep feeling.

"You here?" shouts he; and springs on Athel with the mad fury of a wild-cat.

Had he a knife ready to hand, I think Mr. Bede's life would not be worth a stiver. As it is, though slightly shaken by the force of the onslaught, he quickly recovers himself; and warding off his assailant, whose command of his fists is scarcely tantamount to the heat of his passion, prepares to make the best of a bad job.

Foiled, Paulo turns furiously on Mariana—hurls at her a volley of foul abuse. That such epithets, such language, should be uttered in her hearing, fills Athel with deadly loathing.

"You do not know what you are saying!" exclaims he. "Be silent! Madame, I implore you, leave this man!"

"Madame, I implore you!" mockingly echoes Rocco—madame, I implore you!" wild rage illuminating his convulsed features; and up goes his arm, on Mariana is about to fall the blow that, had he the courage, would long ago have come crashing down on Athel. But, quick as lightning, it is arrested; nay, more, Rocco, bleeding profusely, measures his full length on the ground.

An affrighted scream breaks from the lips of

Mariana. Frantic with terror, she clings to Athel, whose dilated and quivering nostrils, together with the fierce light in his blue eyes, show to what a height his rage has attained, though kept steadily in check, never one instant allowed to gain the mastery.

Athel, sweet-tempered as he is, used as a boy, to be subject to fits of fury that, for the time being, rendered him literally irresponsible. It is the recollection of this, I think, and the numberless acts of folly thence accruing, that exercises so salutary an influence over his usual mood.

The touch of Mariana's hand recalls him to himself; her close proximity infuses sweetness throughout his blood. The very perfume of her apparel, the rare lace wrapped about her face, the mantle that envelops her, soothes him.

Tenderly he gazes down on her; tenderly he clasps those taper fingers.

"Oh, sir," says she, "what shall I do? Is he dead? Have you killed him? Oh, alas, alas!"

"He is by no means dead," replies Athel, coolly. "Perhaps, if he were, it would be no great pity. He deserved what he got richly. And now, what can I do for you?"

It was with difficulty that he refrains from adding some term of endearment, some little pet sound in itself a caress. But before all things Athel Bede is a gentleman, and would bite his tongue out sooner than, either by look or word, suggest to this frightened creature, so softly nestling in his embrace, that he regards her in any other light than the equal of the highest and noblest lady in the land. Nay, he holds her with a knightly care, so that she may feel no constraint in accepting his support.

"Let me think," says Mariana, laying her finger on her lips, a little foreign trick of hers, infinitely sweet. The finger is so white, the lip so red. "Let me consider. Perhaps I had best go to a hotel."

"A happy thought," says Athel, eagerly pouncing on the chance of a prolonged interview."

She cannot send him away all at once; she will, indeed, have need of his aid, his escort.

Forlorn dames, arriving at any one of our great London hostries in the small hours of the night, unincumbered by aught in the shape of luggage, are apt to find those not too hospitable caravanserais unceremoniously closed against them, particularly when unattended, the presence of a gentleman being popularly supposed to abrogate difficulties, canceling doubt as to the forthcoming of supplies; a vulgar error, it is true, yet one deep seated in the British bosom, England still retaining the proud privilege of being just the one land under the sun where women are regarded as objects of suspicion, and men, simply because they are men, endowed with every virtue, real or imaginary.

Thus Athel comforts himself with the reflection that this frail flower of the South will not in her hour of need disdain the protection of one of ruder growth, able to cope with the adverse breeze—brave the tempest.

"I will tell your man where to drive," says he. (What an exquisite foot! Truly a very wonder of a woman!) "You may trust my judgment."

Turning to the sedate individual on the box, who has taken no more notice of the disturbance than if he were cut out of wood, Mr. Bede gives his instructions in an undertone, not wishing to attract the notice of Rocco, who now, one hand feebly buried in his rumpled locks, sits some little way off, vainly endeavoring to collect his scattered and muddled wits.

Barely conscious is Paulo, else would he never suffer his prize thus openly to be carried away from him.

With the sound of the wheels sense returns. Wildly springing to his feet he, the bereaved one, makes a faint attempt at pursuit, simultaneously uttering a cry of blended wrath and weakness, only to stagger against a projecting curbstone, and again fall prone upon the

ground, where he is presently found by two policemen, returning from their respective beats, who courteously pass by on the other side, with fine Samaritan tact and kindness.

Mariana shudders, catching a faint, far-off echo of that despairing yell. It is to her no mere human utterance, but the dying gasp of the expiring past.

The Rocco period is over. Some of our episodes fade out bit by bit. These are adorned by lingering regrets; others end abruptly, come to a climax, and disappear. Of the two, this mode is the least painful—it contains fewer elements of human suffering; yet poets and dramatists prefer the former, for sentiment then enriches the harrowing stages of dissolution. As to the degree of bitterness involved in either, that is a mere matter of chance. But it may be taken as generally true that the more passionate the love at starting, the swifter will be its collapse. Lukewarmness scarcely favors rapid growth; consequently it presents few obstacles to slow decline.

No word utters either Mariana or Athel throughout that long drive. They are together; that is enough. With a man's passion, it is luxury in the eyes of Mr. Bede to be by her side, to inhale the same air that supports her precious life, to occasionally catch the rustle of her dress. All this conveys to Athel a subtle sense, as intense as delicate. Were they more intimate, were he certain of not giving offense, he would put out his hand, I think, gently clasp her rounded arm, to assure himself of her identity—that she is not some lovely phantasm, the creation of his heated thoughts. Ah! Athel is indeed in love. Presently the pace slackens.

"But this is not a hotel," says Mariana, putting out her head, smitten with a vague fear lest he—this man in whom she trusts—should be less honorable, less deserving of confidence than she has believed; for she does trust him, that is certain, as she never trusted Paulo—well as she once loved that worthless being.

"Pardon," smiles Athel, in his placid, polished way. "It is not a hotel, perhaps, in the ordinary acceptation of the word; but you will find it very comfortable, and, what is more, it is strictly private. I have often stopped here myself."

"Is he stopping here now?" wonders she, as he alights.

No difficulty whatever is made about rooms. The transit is effected as speedily and undemonstratively as though Mariana were about to re-enter her own house.

"And now," says Athel, the hall gained, "you had better send for your maid."

"Ah!" says Mariana, struck by the ready way in which he divines her wants; so charming, so gracious!

The order given, away rolls the brougham.

With a sigh of relief, the great opera-singer's sinks into the luxurious fauteuil placed at her disposal.

"How quiet!" says she. "What a change!"

Athel could find in his heart to ask "In what respect?" but he curbs the untoward wish.

"Monsieur," says she presently, regarding him with those wonderful deep eyes of hers, that shine on you like stars, "how can I thank you? I have no words. I am dumb with gratitude. You have delivered me from a tyrant!"

Athel murmurs something. He is a little confused, to tell the truth, by this sudden declaration.

"I dare say," goes on the lady, her fingers nervously busy with the flowers at her bosom—poor faded flowers, the possession of which, if she only knew it, would confer on just one man among many rapture not to be gained through the acquisition of a kingdom—of such stuff are men—"I dare say you think I am very bad?"

"I think you bad!" echoes Athel. "I think no woman fit to be compared with you!" uplifting his earnest face, whereon glows the devotion of a lifetime.

For an instant Mariana regards him strange-

ly. It is so new to her to hear accents replete with truth. Other men have told her she is fair; other men have avowed their love, but this man—

"That is saying too much," smiles she. "Still, I am glad you like me, for I like you very much."

"Like!" echoes Athel; "say love, my idol—my angel!" falling on his knees before her; yes, actually assuming the traditional attitude he has ever held in such scorn. But for once Mr. Bede is mightily stirred. He feels working within him impulses, motives, whereon the issues of fate depend. "Can you not divine my feelings? Oh, Mariana, bid me hope!"

She takes his face between her hands. It burns; he is fain to rest it on her knees.

Thus they remain a space.

Then, looking up, "You will be my wife?" he says, hungrily kissing first one, then the other of those velvet palms that do not seek to free themselves.

That is one charm of Mariana. She will let you love her. She is not averse to tenderness, like our chilly northern women. Athel's greed grows by what it feeds on.

"I yet do not know your name," says she. "I only know he hates you."

"I am called Bede," said Athel.

"Is that all? Surely not. I do not think I can call you Bede," (with a little quivering laugh).

"Call me Athel," says he, prisoning her in his embrace.

Her lips softly repeat the word. Into her eyes comes a sweet, dreamy look. A moment of exquisite suspense, and Athelstane knows that he has won, and, as he believes, a glorious victory.

CHAPTER X. MOST ASTONISHING.

AND now for Dummersmede again, with all its varied sights and sounds—refreshing sights exhilarating sounds—after the reek, and roar, and thunderous din of London.

Paulina thinks she never found Dummersmede one-quarter so attractive as it now appears. For one thing, Athel's absence, so far from inflicting a sense of loneliness on this stony-hearted young woman, is regarded by her in the light of a positive blessing, conferring freedom.

No tiresome great man ensconced in some particular corner—no newspapers strewn untidily about. This young lady cannot understand Athel's fondness for newspapers. To her they seem the dullest productions; but, of course, when you think of going into Parliament, and all that, why then Miss Perrers supposes you must bore yourself with facts.

"But I would much sooner be as I am," sums up she, pausing to sun herself in a very bright beam, that makes quite a pool of amber light on the polished oak floor, into which Paulina steps daintily, as if she were about to bathe.

"Grandma," says she, one day, in a seeming very indifferent way, "do you know that Captain Leycester Miles is still at White-ladies?"

"Is he, indeed, my dear?" returns Mrs. Bede, without looking up.

Mrs. Bede has been rather silent lately. The truth is, she is anything but easy in her mind about Athel—his continued absence, the unsatisfactory and curt nature of his letters, regularly enough dispatched—Athelstane Bede is not the man to be found wanting—but containing little or nothing beyond the bare record of routine.

Paulina's gayety of spirit and girlish recklessness are, I think, at times too much for Mrs. Bede, who cannot but see in them a protest against the decrees of Providence, and a setting up of self in the face of reason.

Mrs. Bede has a shrewd suspicion that all this hilarity is not due entirely to cosmic influences; that the sunshine Paulina finds most enticing resides within a certain pair of blue eyes.

Leycester Miles has found his way over to Dummersmede once or twice lately; for he does not exactly relish the notion of exposing the girl he, in his heart, already worships, to the sneers of the malignant by attentions capable of being styled simply and solely clandestine.

A man of honor, according to his light, Leycester conceives it his duty occasionally to put in an appearance at the Manor, little as he esteems Mrs. Bede's chilling courtesy, or the frigidity of Paulina, subjected to grandma's scrutinizing gaze. Miles thinks he never passed such unpleasant hours in his life as those lately spent in the Dummersmede drawing-room.

But then none but the brave deserve the fair; and as this ornament of his profession has made up his mind to be the envy of his fellows sooner or later, he is scarcely likely to be deterred by petty difficulties.

Still, there can be no doubt he infinitely prefers the stolen talks over park-palings, or at the bend of the road, or in the gamekeeper's cottage, that do now and then beguile the tedium of this most arduous courtship, and send him home glutted with hope and sense of the magnitude of the prize he covets.

Paulina is by no means one of those too well-sunned fruits that are ready to tumble into the mouth of the first comer. She is capricious as unyielding, as contrary almost with Miles as with Athel; the only difference being that, in the one case, indifference was the predisposing cause of levity, whereas now it is all she can do to maintain a fitting show of self-respect, not to cast aside restraint, and let him, her lord and king, see right down into her warm, loving heart.

Yes, Paulina shows off her pretty airs and graces for Captain Leycester Miles's benefit, never remaining in the same mood for two hours together—nay, that would be far too much to ask (say one, rather); by turns fond, saucy, even now and then a little cross, just because she does love him so.

"Isn't he a darling?" beans she on Turk, the splendid St. Bernard who always accompanies her in her rambles.

Turk gazes up at that sweet, flushed face, with eyes expressive of solemn wonder; his tongue hangs out of one side of his mouth.

Turk is hot. The day is warm, and they have taken their usual saunter, in the direction of the mill this time, to be encountered, of course, in the most natural way, by a certain tall, fair man, who seems to take a singular interest in the less interesting flora of the district.

"You big silly!" says Paulina—the massive head between her hands, her own fair locks crowned by an aureole of shining light—"you don't know anything, do you? You're the blindest, dullest old thing conceivable; and that's just the reason why I like you, Turk. If you were a little wiser—even the very tiniest bit—you and I couldn't be half such friends; because then, you see, you might be sly, and—Oh, grandma!"

"What weighty secrets are you confiding, miss, to that stanch ally of yours?" here demands the placid tones of Mrs. Bede, as she slowly sails up the walk, a parasol sheltering her comely head, after her trailing, with quite regal sweep, the lustrous train of her black satin gown.

She has come out to "breathe the air" after two consecutive and protracted calls. Really people do stay such an unconscionable time! They have no pity on one, and they will ask such a host of questions. What can it possibly matter to Mrs. Palliser whether Athel intends to be back by the twelfth or not?

Here Mrs. Bede is, however, lamentably shortsighted.

Mrs. Palliser is burdened in life's race with not merely two boorish sons, who confidently look forward to a great deal of the right sort of thing by-and-by in the Dummersmede covers, but a tribe of unmarried nieces; one of whom, she feels sure, is exactly the very wife to suit Mr. Bede. So, you see, the poor lady's

persistent inquiries are not altogether destitute of point.

"Grandma," exclaims Paulina, "you quite startled me!"

"We Tinturns tread light," replies the old lady. "When I was young, Philip Rous—he is now Lord Daffodil, and he will be the Marquis of Rowantree when his brother dies; the present Marquis is unmarried—well, Philip, poor dear! used to call me Thistledown, and your aunt Alice Snowflake, for that very reason. It comes of having an arched instep."

Paulina draws a long breath. She knows that when grandma begins to repicture the scenes of her youth, she will be in no hurry to abandon that pleasing occupation. Besides, it is time to dress for dinner. The first bell has already rung. With a quick transition of feeling—Miss Perrers is the most ductile of beings—stifling a faint sigh—if only Leycester could come into his kingdom! that tiresome old Lord Mortlake, living on and on, in such a stupid kind of fashion—"He has had his good things; why can he not let us have ours?" reflects this most egotistic and ill-regulated of maidens. Miss Perrers, I say—pressing yet another kiss on Turk's broad brow; he is not the rose, but has been in close contiguity with that miracle of creation—rises, slowly goes upstairs. Oh, how weary these days of waiting are! Will they ever come to an end?—that is, before one's power of endurance is quite exhausted? Patience, Paulina, if you know the meaning of the word.

The very next morning a remarkable surprise awaits the young lady, in the shape of a letter she finds lying on her breakfast-plate. As her eyes recognize the tolerably familiar handwriting, a kind of cold chill strikes to her heart.

Mrs. Bede, contrary to her usual practice, is down first this morning, and already presides with becoming dignity over the tea and coffee.

She must have caught sight of this untoward missive, for to her is the Dummersmede postbag always brought, and hers is the task—not too onerous just at present—of sorting and distributing the family correspondence. Still, she makes no remark over and above the customary "Good-morning."

Paulina thinks this bodes ill. It looks as though grandma knew he meant to write; and what can he have to say but one thing? Because the underlying basis of their slight, very slight attachment has always been that. Did he go away in order to make up his mind?—and has he made it up, and finally determined to ask her to marry him? Surely he would scarcely be such a Goth as to be at the pains to inform her in black and white that she does not seem to him to possess those qualifications desirable in the mother of future Bedes? Paulina, troubled with the dire consciousness that her cheeks are fast growing redder and redder, till they will presently assume the hue of a Tom Thumb geranium, hastily crams the obnoxious letter into her pocket; she will open it when she is alone, secure from the impassive yet crucial gaze of grandma, the terrible stolidity of Thomas.

Mrs. Bede forms her own conjectures. Looking back on the experiences of her girlhood, as we are all apt to do more or less, having passed the limits of that halcyon period, she deems it not at all improbable that Paulina, irritated by the coldness of her quondam suitor—for Mrs. Bede cannot dismiss from her mind the notion that Athel did in some wise, in some way, give the girl to understand that the day might come when they would assume nearer and dearer relations—well, Paulina may have indited a few expostulatory lines, whereto this unexpected epistle, as much a surprise to Mrs. Bede as any one, is of course the answer. That would account for the girl's confusion, patent enough in all conscience; her evident desire to scramble through breakfast, and hie her with her treasure to glades unseen.

By no means displeased with the turn things seem taking, Mrs. Bede good-naturedly

abridges the harmless yet necessary meal, and allows Paulina to depart without a word, without a glance, even, calculated to highten her maiden bashfulness.

Safe in the dim recesses of an out-of-the-way arbor—whither no one ever penetrates, because of the variety of crawling creatures who there find a habitat, albeit the exterior is fair enough, draped with Banksia rose and clematis—Miss Perrers, carefully gathering up her skirts, proceeds to break the seal. Guess what her amazement is then, when, instead of any passionate love-appeal, any cold statement of cautious hopes, her eyes are greeted by a frank avowal of love for another—glowing eulogies of another's charms and worth.

"You must know, my dear Paulina," writes Athel, in the fullness of his heart, "that for a long while past—some years, in short—I have been troubled by a growing sense of the utter hollowness of my life. I have striven against this, I have sought to persuade myself that in me lay the fault, not in those about me, or the actual facts of my existence. But do what I would, the impression remained—that thus far I had missed my aim—that I was, in fact, wandering further and further from that true path, the steady pursuance of which can alone insure happiness."

"Athel write like this!" muses Paulina. "He must be going mad! He must be mad! Still, insane as these reflections seem, they are sufficiently poignant to warrant perusal. She resumes the sheet.

"Since my arrival in town," runs this remarkable document, "I have made the acquaintance of one of the most distinguished women of her day—Signora Mariana, the wonderful soprano whose genius has awakened the enthusiasm of all artistic Europe. This perfect lady has consented to become my wife. We have known and loved each other now for some weeks, and are mutually satisfied that happiness is in store. By to-morrow at noon the family of Bede will be the richer by one member. Think of us, dear Paulina, and do what you can to reconcile my mother to the idea, repugnant at first, no doubt, because we both very well know her thoughts tended in quite another direction. But I am sure, my dear little cousin, you are far too sweet and womanly ever to have made a sacrifice based merely on principles of crude worldly wisdom. I think I can guess in which quarter the wind lies as regards your own predilections, and, believe me, I will do my utmost to forward your wishes, only in return I shall reckon on your good offices. Miles is a fine fellow, and has won his spurs on quite other fields than those covered with Aubusson carpet.

"And now, having tendered this explicit explanation, I may as well end. Tell my mother there is no one on earth I love as well as her, save Mariana. I would send you her portrait, but she begs me not. She says she would rather take you by surprise.

"Always, dear Paulina,
Yours affectionately,
ATHEL."

"Well," says Paulina, oblivious apparently to the fact that a gigantic and superlatively nimble spider is making his way rapidly up her white gown, "that's a pretty tale! Oh!" catching sight of the poor insect. "Oh!"—strickenly.

"Beg pardon, miss," exclaims one of the under-gardeners, who, his spade over his shoulder, a rubbish basket in his grasp, is meditatively proceeding to the scene of his daily toil. Paulina hurtles against him wildly.

"It's only a spider," says she, "but such a big one." And then she laughs, while the tears come into her eyes. It seems such a shame of everything to conspire together to work one ill, because it is no light matter to break tidings such as these to grandma. And Athel knows it, and that is just why he shifts the burden onto shoulders a thousand times weaker than his own. So mean of him! Just like a man! Then, recollecting that Miles also pertains to the male sex, Paulina is smitten with compunction, and thinks within herself that really she must not be so ill-natured, but do what she can, and put as favorable light on the whole affair as possible. But a singer—a professional! Paulina cannot help just a little shudder. Athel, too, of all men under the sun! Verily, truth is stranger than fiction! That is very certain.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SOUL OF HONOR.

MEANWHILE, Fate has not been dealing too leniently with poor Leycester Miles. His creditors, whereof he has a goodly store, in

common with most of the younger scions of our nobility, whose expectations are in the least degree on a par with their necessities—these worthy gentry, then, are beginning to display symptoms of rancor, not to say positive hostility, of a slightly alarming character.

Leycester, as he stands one fine morning moodily examining the contents of some eight or nine suspiciously business-like looking documents, recently submitted to his gaze, is bound mournfully to admit, his eyes bent the while on a pretty mountain ash already bright with fruit, one strong white hand buried in that silky brown beard of his, that, as he puts it, "his tether is up." No more funds forthcoming from any source that Captain Leycester Miles can descry.

True, he might sell his commission, quit the service; and "that is just what these hounds are egging me on to do," meditates he. "But I won't be so weak as that. I won't knock about for the rest of my life, an out-at-elbows, used-up sort of fellow, glad of a dinner at the expense of any one who'll be good enough to provide it for me, without a place to call my own, or a copper in my pocket! No, hang it all! I'll exchange first! go on active service! I've seen some life—I'll see more! It's awfully hard on the little girl."

That is the way Leycester Miles mostly thinks of Paulina. She will be "the little girl" to the Captain to the end of the chapter—yea, though she live to be his wife, and ninety. And then the thought strikes him that she is quite sufficiently enamored of his hirsute self to face all risks, follow him to the world's end.

But he is too much of a man to take advantage of such trust. No; he and "the little girl" will say good-by. They will get it over somehow.

It need not be good-by altogether, because the old man cannot live forever. He must be a goodish age by this time. Miles has really never been at the pains to acquire accurate information on this point, but doubtless the money-lenders know something about it, otherwise they would scarcely have been so obliging.

Well, one's prospects are not quite so black, after all. Then suddenly Leycester bethinks him that Paulina, not being exactly penniless, or the style of girl to wait long for a husband, it might not be quite honorable to ask her to enter into a definite engagement; to remain unwed, in short, till the clouds now so darkly obscuring their horizon shall have vanished.

No; seen from a man's point of view, that decidedly is not the fitting course; quite otherwise, in fact—rather disgraceful—rather mean.

With a heavy sigh, the Captain relinquishes the ungrateful task of endeavoring to perceive that silver lining the old saw tells us of.

Yet "the little girl" loves him—of that he feels assured; as, moreover, she will never love any other man, be he her husband ever so much.

"And the day will perhaps come," gloomily pursues he, "when we shall meet, between us the barrier of other ties, and—"

But no; Miles is determined that at least shall never sully the memory of this love, the truest, purest ever harbored in his breast. Miles, I think, has had about enough of that sort of thing.

The Caversham *regime* has almost sickened him.

In this way women like the fair Agnes redeem themselves. They make clear to men their stupidity.

Very surprised is "the little girl" when, on keeping tryst as usual by the Dummer Elm, a magnificent ruin of a tree, once the tenth wonder of the world, now scarred and maimed, she notes how very grave, even careworn, her tall swain looks.

A deft query or two, and the secret is told.

"Yes, little one," says he, "it's no use trying to shirk. The day has come, and the hour. We must part, my Paulina."

Paulina's great, soft eyes dilate; her mouth first purses itself up, then quivers.

"Don't cry, dear," says he, kindly taking that little hand. "It will only make it worse, and it is bad enough, surely!"

To that she can say nothing, so turns away with a convulsive sob.

"You see, darling," pursues he, in that soft, dear voice of his that murmurs sweet nothings so adorably, "if you weren't rich—"

"Oh, Leycester!" exclaims she, "how can you?" her whole self trembling with emotion.

"Well, but, dear," he urges, "you know it makes a difference."

"Why, except that all I have is yours?"

Rather trying this, to have a splendid fortune flung at your feet, together with the hand of the woman who is dearer to you than life, when every penny is of moment, and you do not know how long you may escape arrest, the ignominious seclusion of a debtor's prison.

But Miles will not be tempted. He puts her away from him resolutely, though it cuts him to the heart.

"No, love," says he; "that must not be. You know I say this out of no—how shall I put it?—falling off in affection; you know I love you dearly; but I cannot be pointed at as the man who let his wife pay his ticks. That is the matter-of-fact way of looking at it, pet; and that is the view you must try to take, for my sake, dearest. Now kiss me, Paulina, and shake hands."

"I can't!" sobs she; "it will kill me! Do you wish to kill me? Oh, Leycester!" clinging to him convulsively, the while she sinks in a sitting posture on the dusty green bank by the roadside.

For a moment, I think, the Captain, brave man as he is, wavers. For a moment, I think, the primrose path seems fair—only for a moment, though. Smitten to the quick by the spectacle of this supreme self-abandonment, he, hurriedly stooping, imprints a warm kiss on Paulina's cheek, and strides off. Each step he takes is like a stab plunged deep into his heart; but go he must.

Some things there are, harder than simply to pay one's debts. Yet is the British trader a trifle dense in respect thereof. An abject coward before his own conscience but a few hours back, Leycester Miles now carries himself with the proud air of a man who feels not ashamed to face any one—not even the recording angel. He has done his duty, he has left her he would give his life to protect and cherish, crying, fit to break her heart, by the wayside.

Ah, me! how tangled is life! Happy he who, like Miles, can discern just a faint gleam of light anywhere.

CHAPTER XII.

QUITE A MISTAKE.

PLUNGED in deep despair, unable to wrench her mind away from the consideration of herself and her affliction, that seems to brood over and even fill the world, Paulina Perrers is but little inclined to mix or meddle in the affairs of others.

Selfish, you will say; but "little girls" are apt to be selfish, particularly when their own small hearts are sore. Even a spoilt gown, a torn glove, has before now been known to upset the nicely-poised mental balance common to these delicate organizations. How much more, then, when one's whole future lies wrapt in gloom? Surely one may be pardoned a little irrelevancy.

That Miles has put his hastily-formed project into execution admits not of doubt.

Susan's "young man"—Susan is the head housemaid at Dummersmede, and occasionally does small services for Miss Perrers—Susan's affianced, then, drove Captain Leycester Miles to the station himself—he being one of the grooms attached to Whiteladies—the very afternoon of that ill-omened day which Paulina, passionately bemoaning herself, declares she wishes she had never lived to see.

"How unkind of him! Why did he go? Why could he not stay and think it over, and

just see me once again, so as to give one a chance of demonstrating the utter folly of the thing? Now he will be shot of course!"

Did not grandma read in the *Times* only yesterday that matters were in a most disturbed state at the Cape? In all probability strong reinforcements will be required to keep those horrid black people in check. Ah, and of course his will be the first regiment pitched upon, simply because "Captain Miles" figures on its roll-call.

Paulina feels crushed. It is too dreadful. Poor little soul, her active-imagination conjures up scenes of the utmost horror, in all of which Leycester, of course, plays a conspicuous part.

Now he is charging yelling savages; now he is battling for dear life against fearful odds in a stockade; now he is—oh! but that is really too frightful! The girl covers her eyes with a convulsive shudder, turns away from that gruesome spectacle.

At length wrought up to a pitch verging on hysteria by the ceaseless consideration of these horrid visions, she one very wet day takes it into her head to wander, insufficiently clad—nothing on her shoulders by way of outer covering save a light woolen shawl—down the road to where Miles bade her adieu, to where her hand last laid locked in his, to where the blow fell that has stricken her prostrate. An odd whim, one that will cost her dear.

That evening symptoms begin to display themselves of a bad, feverish cold; by the next morning, after a night of utter sleeplessness and misery, Miss Perrers begins to be aware of the extent of her rashness, augmented not a little by the fact that she really does not care much whether she gets better or worse.

Indeed, at this stage of the disorder, there seems a certain attractiveness about the latter hypothesis.

"Perhaps, then, he would be sorry; perhaps, then, he might regret thinking so much more about money than me," muses Paulina, vengeancefully; her cheeks bright scarlet, and her throat unpleasantly like a brand new file.

Mrs. Bede is sorely troubled to discover the source of all this discomfort. Paulina is resolutely silent.

"She has caught cold," she supposes. "Please don't let any one bother. It really does not signify."

"But that is quite nonsense," says the poor lady, wrought to distraction, what with her anxiety about Athel, and now this great trouble. "Of course you must see Jefferson, and try to get well. My dear, you are really very incomprehensible. I have not been able to make you out at all lately. What are you fretting about?"

A little whimpering cry breaks from Paulina—a very pitiful, small sound.

"My love," exclaims Mrs. Bede, "pray do not give way. I cannot bear to see you so." And then, with a light caress of the poor flushed face, goes straight to her own room, there to indite a very tempest of remonstrance to the recreant Athel.

"You do not know the havoc you have created," writes this indignant lady, "by your utterly heartless and cruel conduct. Paulina is dying." (This is not quite true, but it looks well, and may have a good effect.) "She has caught a violent cold, and may take a turn for the worse at any moment. We are all thoroughly exhausted. I have been up for the last three nights, and the maids can't get a wink of sleep. For Heaven's sake, come yourself, and bring a nurse. Go to one of the London hospitals, and choose a competent person. You will lose both wife and fortune if you do not take care. *What are you about?* I cannot imagine; no good, I fear. Your conduct is giving rise to the most sinister surmises. Indeed, I heard it stated only yesterday that you had fallen into the hands of some low adventuress. Bring no such person here, Athel. I will not be under the same roof with vice. Here is this sweet girl enduring martyrdom, while you—Oh, my son! my son! grieved am I indeed to pen these lines."

And, indeed, Mrs. Bede's equanimity does here desert her. She pauses to wipe away a tear fallen on the page.

This letter finds Athel and Mariana calmly seated at breakfast at a little table placed in the bow-window of a certain marine hostelry not a thousand miles off the picturesque shores

of lovely Dart. They have been married ten days, and their happiness is intense. The simple morning meal that commonly ushers in a cloudless day is almost over. The prawns have been as good as usual, the bread as sweet, the eggs as faultless. Athel has breakfasted, and is comfortably lounging at his ease, preparatory to commencing on the wind-up cigar.

It is very pleasant, it will be pleasanter still when the horses come round, and Mariana, again the picture of health, is lifted to the saddle by the strong arm of her husband—oh, goodliest name! As she sits there, sunning herself in the equal light of earth and love, perhaps her mind strays back to the past. Queen of beauty, idol of the throng! whene'er did she experience this feeling of content?—content, indeed, was absent from her life. So she thinks idly sitting here adream.

Of Rocco she has heard nothing. No doubt he is aware of the hue her future has assumed—a trifle sober maybe, but, oh, so comforting to eyes accustomed to the glare, nerves kept at tension pitch!

Money is his concern. Money he must, nay, will have; and no fresh engagement being on the *tapis*, very likely the thought has struck him—he is so knowing, so mighty shrewd—that it may be worth his while to turn his attention elsewhere.

Mariana sickens as she thinks of the man—nay, brute—into whose hands she once thought of surrendering herself.

"Give it to me," says Athel, as a servant enters, bearing in her hand a letter.

The girl hands it to him.

Athel has noticed that within the last five minutes his beautiful wife has turned oddly pale.

Athel Bede has quick eyes for what interests him. He dreads some rude shock to their even happiness.

But, no! Delicate feminine characters greet his eyes.

Mariana rises—the girl being gone, reads over his shoulder.

The reproaches, the angry protests, stir her not. This is not a woman to be moved by mere words.

"It is so natural," says she, her two soft, white hands knitting themselves about his neck.

"Athel," says she, at length—the paper quivers. "Did Paulina never get his letter, then? What a child it is!"

Athel feels convinced some foreign influence must be at work. Something quite other than his vagaries must have strangely stirred this young and martyred soul.

"Well, love?" says he, leaning back his head.

"Let me go and nurse your cousin; then it will be all right. They need not know, and they will get to like me. Let me go."

"But, Mariana—" "I can take very good care of sick people. Ask Annette! She was ill three months last spring, and she only wanted me."

"We all want you," says Athel, tenderly, upturning eyes full of love. "Why, then, leave me to want you worst of all? I"—mock pathetically—"I shall fall ill."

"You cannot quarrel with your mother," says Mariana, softly, but firmly. "It is to win your mother I would make this sacrifice."

Athel is silent. She feels she has touched the right strain.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SICK NURSE.

ILL, and very ill, lies Paulina. Hers is no light ordeal. Days and days pass in apparently vain battling with disease, but the victory is declared hers at last, thanks to assiduous care and a naturally vigorous constitution.

She has only been ill once before in all her life, and then with the measles, a comparatively harmless ailment.

When she awakens from that long sleep the doctors—two in number, and of high repute—declare will mark the turning point, she finds

by her bedside the same grave, tender face that has haunted her for days.

"You feel better, do not you?" says Mariana, momentarily, her pearly teeth embellishing a quick, sweet smile.

Paulina gazes at her wonderingly.

How comes a mere woman to be so beautiful? She feels as if she could fling her arms about her neck and kiss her, just because she is so lovely.

Paulina's is an impressionable nature. There is not a touch of spite, either, about the girl.

Little by little, their hearts begin to open out toward each other.

"Be quite comforted," writes Mariana to the lord of her affections in one of those brief snatches of confidence she occasionally allows herself, her professional duties (of which she acquires herself surprisingly well)—to the complete satisfaction of every one) being fairly arduous; "your beautiful cousin is dying to marry one Leycester Miles, who, it seems, has got into some mess. I am on the best of terms with them all."

Athel puts this letter into his pocket, lights a cigar, and starts for his club.

Pausing in the reading-room to glance at the evening papers, he catches sight of an announcement to the effect that the 30th Hussars—Leycester Miles's regiment—are likely to be ordered at once on active service.

The thing troubles him. He pulls his mustache, and the waiter notices that he has considerable difficulty in ordering dinner, which strikes that functionary as strange—Mr. Bede, in a general way, being a very clear-headed sort of gentleman.

One other announcement does not chance to meet Athel's gaze, which mishap costs him only a sleepless night and considerable mental disquietude.

"At his town residence, 61 Hindostan Square, on the 3d inst., George Augustus Adolphus, Earl of Mortlake, in his 69th year."

Such is the announcement that sends the hearts up into the mouths and the tongues wagging in the heads of at least two-thirds of the people now assembled at Whiteladies.

Lilla Lunelle almost wishes she had made better use of her time, past and present. Lady Caversham, I think, feels rather chagrined. A change of this sort has such an influence on a man; he can scarcely afford to retain his old friends; and these, again, can expect scant quarter from the new ones, who, of course, have their own running to make.

Lord Caversham, I think, takes the thing more coolly. To be raised to the peerage is no such great boon, in his estimation. It only exposes you to the machinations of sharpers. Besides, when a man has good blood in his veins, what does it matter whether he is plain "sir" or "my lord?"

CHAPTER XIV.

PLEASANTLY ARRANGED.

It is a lovely autumn day. The air is fragrant with the scent of late roses; a delicious feeling of rest prevails; tender amber light dwells on the trees, and beyond the green hills.

It is the first day on which Paulina—so little, so pale a Paulina—has experienced anything like a sense of returning health. She has been ill so long—a month almost—and her strength is slow to return.

"It is not," says she, "as though my body alone were sick; my mind, too, is pained."

Still, to-day sees her out for the first time, muffled up in furs and shawls, and set on a low garden chair, right in the eye, the bright round eye, of the sun.

Paulina will be very tired presently. Now she feels almost like herself, and able to enjoy the pleasant sights that strike one so after weeks passed in doors. Only the sick and captive, of a truth, know this.

Lapped in calm pleasure the girl sits, little dreaming of what is in store; little dreaming, indeed, of anything.

On a sudden Mariana—Nurse as she is pleased to style herself—appears. Paulina's face brightens; she is never so happy as when they are together. With fine womanly tact, Athel's wife has contrived to make them all love her.

Even Mrs. Bede, whom at first she found a little chill—Mrs. Bede, very well appreciating her own position, the privileges it confers, and the duties it entails, neither of which she is in the least degree inclined to abrogate—even the chatelaine of Dummersmede has found it impossible to withstand that inexpressibly winning manner, the charm and beauty of that face.

"Sister Marie," said she, taking the white hand—she will call Marie "sister," though naught of "religion," technically so termed, pertains to that zealous being—"Sister Marie, you are a wonder. You must rest well soon."

Mariana smiled.

"I shall rest," thought she, "for all my life."

But sweetest thoughts are mute.

And so they stood and smiled, and each deemed each the most perfect upon earth.

Now Mariana speeds over the sward with a step light as air, and features all radiant. In her hand she holds the *Times*. Depositing it on Paulina's knee—a buoyant enthusiasm about her that seems to bespeak joy—"See!" says she, laying her finger on a single paragraph; "I am so glad!"

Paulina's eyes question.

"See," she reiterates. "'On the 12th instant, at his town residence, 61 Hindostan Square—' Ah! you know."

"Give it to me," exclaims the girl, now red as she was white. And her greedy eyes—as Mariana laughingly relinquishes the paper—fasten on the astounding news.

"Poor old man!" muses she; "69— You see what a while Leycester must have had to wait." Mariana laughs. The innocent worldliness of the remark is amusing.

"What shall we do, though?" goes on Paulina. "Suppose he has sailed?—then he will never know till perhaps it is too late. When he is stretched on a bed of sickness, or—" Her eyes fill, she lets the paper fall, and over her face steals a look of deep despondency.

"Come," says Mariana; "this won't do at all. Here is your soup; I told them to bring it out here, because I thought you would like it best in the fresh air."

"You are always kind," falteringly smiles her patient, pressing the outstretched hand.

But at that very instant the door-bell peals. Something in its clang seems to startle instinct. Paulina reddens, so does Mariana. Both appear strangely struck; so much so that they quite forget all about Thomas, who stands, tray in hand, immutable, as though he meant to stand there till doomsday.

Presently a door bangs; steps approach.

"Well ladies?" says Athel.

Yes, Athel! by all that's miraculous; suave, smiling, in apparently the best of spirits.

With an effort Mariana restrains herself—does not rush into the arms that would so fondly close on her.

"So there you are! What a beautiful day! You see, I have brought you a visitor; or, shall I say, a friend?"

It is Leycester, at the sight of whom Paulina utters a little shriek, faints in Mariana's arms. But the brief swoon soon passes. Soon, kindly care gives back to this happy girl the sense of her great bliss.

Presently they are sitting side by side—so glad, so glad!—while Mariana and Athel—well, they are apparently lost in admiration of the Dummersmede dovecote.

"Heyday!" exclaims Mrs. Bede, suddenly chancing on this ecstatic quartette, having been for a stroll through the adjacent meadows and round the walks. "Dear me, Captain Miles! I thought you were in South Africa."

"Captain Miles no longer, grandma," smiles Paulina, blushing deliciously. "Have you not seen to-day's *Times*? Leycester is Lord Mortlake."

Somehow, without another word, Mrs. Bede seems to take in the situation.

"Ah, Athel!" says she, shaking her finger at him, with old-fashioned pleasantries. "You've lost your wife."

"Nay, mother," rejoins he, placing a certain soft hand, with equally old-fashioned gallantry, upon his arm; "I have found her."

Mrs. Bede's brows contract. She is fairly puzzled.

"I feel very strange," she says, moving a step.

In an instant they surround her; they, these loving ones, in the serene atmosphere of whose devoted cares she is to pass the remainder of her days.

Gently she is led to a seat. A few words of explanation suffice.

"My dear," says the old lady, turning to Mariana, the poor "bindweed," whose right to be worn as a flower can no more be questioned, "you did well to come. Leycester thanks you; Athel loves you; I accept you as my daughter—my dear daughter!"

Mariana bows her head to that gentle kiss.

"Mother!" she murmurs.

This is the work of one little afternoon.

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